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**S P E E C H E S**  
**OF THE**  
**RIGHT HONOURABLE**  
**RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.**  

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**VOL II.**



THE  
S P E E C H E S  
OF THE  
RIGHT HONOURABLE  
RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

*With a Sketch of his Life.*

EDITED BY  
A CONSTITUTIONAL FRIEND.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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# S P E E C H E S

OF THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

**RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.**

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APRIL 19.

WAYS AND MEANS.

*Mr. Pitt opened the debate by stating the various articles of supply which had been voted, and afterwards the amount of the annual revenue. He concluded by moving—"That it is the opinion of this committee, that the sum of £2,300,000 be taken from the consolidated fund, and applied to the service of the current year."*

MR. SHERIDAN declared, that it would have given him great pleasure if he could have reconciled it to himself to have continued wholly silent, without appearing either to disturb the flattering prospect which the right hon. gentleman (the chancellor of the exchequer) had presented to the committee, or to depreciate the calculation on which he had claimed the confidence of the house; but the right hon. gentleman had himself declared, that it had proved the greatest glory of the house of commons when they manifested the courage to face their situation, and to state the truth of it, however unpleasant the task. On this ground, he felt himself compelled to maintain every one of his former calculations; and whilst he agreed with the minister in his general principles, and in his statement of the growing prosperity of the country, completely to disagree with him in the single fact that our income was equal, or nearly equal, to our expenditure. He had never spoken in a desponding state of our resources; on the contrary, no man thought more highly of them, if judiciously applied. But his opinion was founded pre

cisely on the principle which the right hon. gentleman had dwelt so much on ; and this was a sanguine confidence in the energies derived from our constitution, and the exertions which belonged to our national character. This the right hon. gentleman had well called the vital principle of our commercial prosperity ; but it was one thing to call it so, and another to act on that conviction. He rejoiced to hear him admit the principle, but he should rejoice more when he saw him abstain from violating this vital principle by arbitrary checks on the liberty, security, and industry of the subject. The right hon. gentleman had stated the amount in a complicated manner ; the usual forms and practice justified some part of the mode, which was intelligible to a very few. The method he should pursue was simply to compare the actual income with the actual expenditure ; this he would do on the average of the four past year and the present year. Mr. Sheridan then went through a variety of calculations from papers on the table, from which he contended that it was evident that the average annual income of the four last years was £15,723,000 and the annual expenditure was £17,140,104 ; excess of the expenditure, including what was called the surplus million beyond the income of each year, two millions and some thousand pounds. Mr. Sheridan then stated the extra and temporary resources by which this deficiency had been made up, and the actual addition to the unfunded debt, independent of the loan of last year, which had been contracted while we were pretending to reduce our funded debt. He then waived all unfavourable inferences from this review of the past, and resorting to the figures which he had taken down from Mr. Pitt's own statement that day, he called on the committee to see how the account really stood for the present year. The chancellor of the exchequer had taken the best average he could—that of the three last years. This account made the average income £15,720,000 and this was the income which the right hon. gentleman calculated at for the present year. He would say nothing to impeach this average, though much might be said, particularly with respect to the manner in which the arrears of the land and window tax had been whirled in and added to this year's produce, and the annual malt duty being taken above its actual amount. But, how did the head of expenditure stand upon his own figures, and on demands not to be disputed ?



Navy	-	-	-	-	£2,200,000
Army	-	-	-	-	1,870,000
Ordnance	-	-	-	-	457,000
American loyalists	-	-	-	-	274,000
Miscellaneous expenses	-	-	-	-	328,000
Total					£5,129,000
Add to this, interest of debt	-	-	-	-	9,275,000
Paid for reduction of debt	-	-	-	-	1,000,000
Civil list	-	-	-	-	900,000
Interest on exchequer bills	-	-	-	-	258,000
Charge on aggregate fund	-	-	-	-	64,000
The appropriated duties	-	-	-	-	66,000
Militia	-	-	-	-	91,000
Increase of navy debt this year	-	-	-	-	150,000
					11,804,000
Add services of the year	-	-	-	-	5,133,000

Total of this year's expenditure at present  
demanded - - - £16,937,000

But, Mr. Sheridan observed, as there were many matters omitted, as paying for finishing Somerset House and Carlton House, he was confident that he understood the year's expenditure when he put it at seventeen millions. Here then the matter was brought to a narrow compass; the utmost income the minister pretended to reckon on was £15,723,000, the difference, therefore, amounting to nearly £1,300,000, was the actual deficiency between our income and expenditure.

Here, Mr. Sheridan declared, he made his stand; if the right hon. gentleman's principle was right, that the truth ought to be known, here was a statement which admitted of no possible dispute; for every figure of it was taken from accounts upon the table:—if it was answered, that we were not yet arrived at the peace establishment, and that the expenditure would be greatly reduced, to that he would say nothing, but impress on the minds of the committee the indispensable duty of looking to the performance of these promises; otherwise, after all the pleasing prospects which were offered to us, and the eloquent congratulations of that day, the obstinate and unfortunate fact



would be, that we were a government expending considerably more than a million beyond our income. Mr. Sheridan, advert- ing slightly to the advantages which we reaped from the calamitous situation of the rest of Europe, thought sufficient allowance had been given for this by the chancellor of the exchequer when he mentioned the subject; but he would not urge it, because it was the only source of our prosperity which could not be dwelt upon with pleasure.

He next mentioned the resource of the lottery, and regretted that it should have been so triumphantly announced to the committee. He contended that the ultimate and permanent loss to the community, in the injury done to the industry and integrity of the lower class of people infinitely outweighed any temporary gain which the minister could derive from it. He opposed it, therefore, on the same principle (and he had uniformly done so) that he opposed the extension of the excise, because it was part of a system which looked to a momentary gain at the expense of those sound and superior principles which formed the true foundation of our prosperity. He looked not to the exchequer for the produce of a lottery, but to the Old Bailey; not to the temporary advantage to the state in a pecuniary point of view, but to the exports to Botany Bay. In conclusion, Mr. Sheridan repeated, that he felt a sincere satisfaction at the general prospect of the country's being in so flourishing a situation.

*Mr. Pitt endeavoured to point out the alleged fallacy of Mr. Sheridan's reasoning, and the supposed erroneous foundation on which he had built his comparison, and then assigned reasons to prove, that all that part of his speech which tended to take from the conduct of having paid off nearly six millions, was exposed to question, and even to confutation, &c. Mr. Fox next spoke.*

Mr. Sheridan rising a second time, remarked, that if he could judge from the manner of the right hon. gentleman, he appeared to have reserved the mildness of a peace establishment for his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox), and had hoarded his hostile spirit for him. He might as well, however, have shown, that

Grim-visaged war hath smooth'd his wrinkled front:

because the right hon. gentleman well knew, that when he felt himself on right grounds, this spirit was not apt to weigh much with him. He declared besides, that he should have answered with equal hostility, had not some time elapsed, and his feeling subsided. The point in contest between them was, whether they

were likely to have a reduction of the expenditure next year, so as to provide for the surplus of a million? In the whole of the right hon. gentleman's system there did not seem the spirit of making a reduction likely to bring the expenditure within, or even nearly within the estimate of the committee of 1786. How was he to make it? Was the army to be reduced? or the ordnance prodigality to be curbed? High-sounding sentences of prosperity were very pleasing to the ear; but in matters of figures and accounts the subject must be more closely examined, and he should continue to repeat that our income was not equal to our expenditure, till it was proved to be equal. With regard to lotteries, he had, perhaps, had greater opportunity of knowing their bad consequences than most gentlemen. He was persuaded that if those consequences were as well understood by the committee in general, there could be but one opinion on the subject. Having brought in a plan for the regulation of the police of Westminster which the right hon. gentleman would not reproach him with having abandoned (as it was abandoned by administration, and not by him), he had come at facts which proved that lotteries were most fatal in their consequences. Mr. Sheridan explained this declaration relative to the police of Westminster by stating, that a plan for regulating that police had been framed by a barrister, and brought forward from Lord Sydney's office; that he had cordially assisted in making it, and given every help in his power, though it was not to be known that he did so, nor was he to derive any credit from it: that he necessarily had many conferences with the Westminster justices, and they produced to him a pawnbroker, who said that he never had such a number of things brought to him in the course of the whole year as during the drawing of the lottery. That first, the men brought their tools, then the women their clothes, and one thing after another, till at length they brought even the light silver clasps out of their childrens' shoes, and at last such a picture of penury, distress, and despair was exhibited, as must make every man of the least feeling shudder. That picture justified him in asserting, that let the profit acquired from the lottery be ever so great, he should reject it as the base gain derived from a vile and pernicious plan of playing upon the worst passions of the poor and laborious class of people. Perhaps the right hon. gentleman and the committee might



think him too warm ; but he could not avoid using the strongest language of reprobation, when he perceived that our prodigality equalled, and even exceeded our income, and that we were imprudently most serious in providing means of expense, when our enemies were sunk into a state of debility.

*The resolution passed.*

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APRIL 21.

EXPENDITURE OF THE PUBLIC MONEY IN THE ORDNANCE  
DEPARTMENT.

*Mr. Courtenay moved, " That a committee be appointed to examine into the expenditure of the public money, under the administration of the present master-general and board of ordnance, from the 1st of January, 1784."*

MR. SHERIDAN expressed his concern that he had not been present in the early part of the debate, and then proceeding, rested the question on three issues : first, that the noble duke had declared that he would state the accounts yearly, and had not done so for four years, till called upon to produce them ; next, that he had put the public to an unnecessary expense ; and, thirdly, that the estimate on the table was false and fallacious. When the corps of royal engineers was proposed to be reduced, the noble duke stated his motive for avoiding that reduction, and desired to use the men as military artificers. This the house granted, and the next year, the noble duke averred the men were totally unfit to act in that capacity ; and he desired to have a new corps formed of artificers. The hon. gentleman had boasted, that when an account was called for, the ordnance board had presented one in a short time ; but why was it not every year laid on the table according to the noble duke's promise ? After a variety of other observations, Mr. Sheridan next remarked, that the chancellor of the exchequer had commenced his speech with a panegyric on the order of that house. He was ready to admit that the speaker was at all times attentive to the preservation of order ; but he was not willing to go so far as to say, that under his auspices they might hope for a restoration of order, because he had some degree of respect for the memory of the speaker's predecessors. As to his right hon. friend, whom the minister had, with a degree of illiberality, singled out as an individual instance of a member prone to go

*ab re ad personam*, it was scarcely necessary to mention an acknowledged fact, and affirm that there was no person more free from personality in general.

*The motion was negatived without a division.*

---

APRIL 23.

DUTIES ON POST-HORSES.

*Mr. Rose brought in a bill for rendering perpetual the act for empowering the commissioners of the treasury to farm the duties payable on post-horses, which was read a first time.*

MR. SHERIDAN expressed his astonishment at seeing a bill fraught with such danger, and introducing so new a principle in the collection of the revenue of this country, brought in without the smallest previous notice. If such a bill were suffered to pass in silence, it might be considered as a very favourable precedent for extending the principle to other branches of the revenue; and, for that reason, he wished to call the attention of the house to the measure. What advantages the revenue might have derived from the new mode of collecting the post-horse tax, he was at a loss to guess; because those whose duty it was to bring such matters forward, at a proper time, had neglected to produce any account of its increase.

*Mr. Pitt answered, that the alteration of the mode of collection had undoubtedly been of considerable advantage to the revenue, and therefore he wished to render the act permanent. He did not mean to hurry it through the house; and if the hon. gentleman had any intention of opposing the principle, he would have an opportunity of doing so on the second reading. He had no objection to produce the account.*

Mr. Sheridan expressed his satisfaction that the right hon. gentleman had so far acquiesced as to think an account necessary, though he could not help saying it would have come with more propriety before the bill was brought in. Mr. Sheridan then moved that the bill be printed, which was ordered, and the second reading was fixed for the ensuing Tuesday.

FEES AND PERQUISITES TO THE DISTILLING OFFICE.

*Mr. Whitbread having moved that an humble address be presented to his Majesty, that he would be graciously pleased to order the report of the commissioners who had been appointed to examine into the fees and perquisites paid at the various public offices, to be laid before the house, so far as the same related to the victualling office, a conversation of some length took place.*



*Mr. Pitt opposed the motion, on the ground that no good reason had been given for the production of a partial report—and Mr. Rose, because it might tend to criminate certain gentlemen who had taken an oath with regard to emolument of office.*

Mr. Sheridan said, if he had ever entertained a doubt of the propriety of having the report before the house, he was now convinced of the necessity of it. If any abuses existed, he thought it fully as expedient that those who committed them should be responsible to the house of commons, as well as to his Majesty's ministers.

*At length Mr. Hussey moved an amendment which was agreed to—that the whole of the report of the commissioners, so far as they had proceeded, should be laid before the house.*

#### EXCISE DUTIES ON TOBACCO.

*The order of the day being moved for the second reading of the bill for explaining and amending the tobacco excise bill, passed in the last session of parliament,*

Mr. Sheridan observed, though he had been obliged to abandon his arguments against the principle of the bill, from the decision of the house, the manufacturers of tobacco were so fully convinced of the injustice of the principle, that he had in his hand a petition from them, praying that the survey of the excise might not be applied to the manufacture of tobacco.

*The petition was brought up and ordered to be referred to the committee of the whole house on the ensuing Tuesday.*

#### SLAVE TRADE.

*Mr. Wilberforce moved, that Captain Wilson do attend the committee on the slave trade, as an evidence.*

Mr. Sheridan said he should vote for the question of the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Wilberforce), though he was decidedly of opinion that it was the duty of that house to determine on the general question in the course of this session. It would be to the last degree impolitic to leave it to the consideration of a new set of men, who might be ignorant of the information collected by the present parliament on this subject. He was convinced, however, sufficient evidence would be adduced in time to satisfy every member with regard to his vote on the general question of abolition. For his part he required no evidence—no further information to convince him, that the power possessed by the West India merchant over the slave, was such a power as no man

ought to have over another. He conceived that the evidence now wanted was not connected with the establishment of regulations in the trade ; nor, indeed, necessarily with the general question, which it was undoubtedly proper to decide upon previously to the expiration of the present session.

*The motion was carried without a division.*

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APRIL 27.

POST-HORSE DUTY FARMING BILL.

*The order of the day being read for the second reading of this bill,*

MR. SHERIDAN having signified his intention of moving for some papers extremely necessary, in his conception, to be submitted to the house previously to the second reading of the bill ; he relied, therefore, on the right hon. gentleman's (Mr. Pitt) candour, that he would have no objection to postpone the second reading for a few days, which could be attended with no sort of inconvenience ; and by that time, in all probability, the papers could be got ready and presented. Mr. Sheridan moved for

“ An account of the gross produce of the post-horse duties for the year 1787, ending the 1st of August ;” also for

“ An account of the number of districts under the farmers' act ; the names of the farmers, and the amount of the rents respectively, with any variations thereon, that have taken place from the first letting to the present time ;” also

“ An account of such of the farmers of the post-horse duties as have become defaulters, and to what amount ;” and also

“ An account of the expense of collecting the post-horse duty previous to the passing the act of the 27th of his present Majesty, and the amount of the saving to the public, in the mode of collection, in consequence of passing the said act.”

*Mr. Pitt answered, that he could readily consent to the production of the papers moved for ; but as the use intended to be made of them might as well be employed in any other stage of the progress of the bill as on the second reading, he saw no reason for delaying it.*

Mr. Sheridan replied, that to press the matter with so much precipitation betrayed a want of candour ; and he contended that the house ought not to have proceeded a single step with the bill until the right hon. gentleman had given the necessary information as to the produce of the tax, whilst under the old mode of collection, compared with that under the farming bill,



which was originally introduced or revived as a bill of experiment; and the principle of which should not be adopted as a permanent mode of collecting duties, without very full information and mature discussion. It behoved the house not to proceed towards deciding on the principle of the bill until the papers were before them; from which he (Mr. Sheridan) meant to prove that the principle was false, and the expectation of greater advantage being capable of being derived from it, than from the old mode of collection, utterly fallacious.

*Mr. Pitt rejoined, that if the hon. gentleman had thought the papers necessary to be before the house prior to any proceeding with the bill, he ought to have moved for those papers antecedent to the first reading, and not to have delayed moving for them till that day. For his own part he had not the smallest objection to the production of the papers now moved for; although he saw not how they could possibly throw any additional light on the subject. By the papers giving an account of the net produce already before the house, there was an evident increase; for whatever the gross revenue might appear from the papers moved for, the net produce, it was plain from the papers before the house, had increased from £97,000 in 1786, to £102,000 the first year that the duty was farmed, and in the second to £127,000.*

Mr. Sheridan observed, that lawyers too frequently discovered a tenacity in overturning the rules and orders of that house, which the hon. and learned gentleman's argument evinced; as upon a moment's reflection, the hon. and learned gentleman must perceive that the rule of proceeding in opposing bills was directly the reverse of that which he had laid down. It was a curious way of using dispatch to postpone the business to a late period of the session, and to endeavour to make up for the loss of time, in the first instance, by hurrying the most important bill through with indecent celerity. To prove his assertion that the farming duty bill had not been so productive as had been stated by the right hon. gentleman, he had it from good authority that the whole of Scotland had been farmed out as one district, without the advance of a single shilling on the produce of the duty under the old mode of collection; and this circumstance was still further strengthened as an argument against the new plan of farming out the collection of the revenue, by the speculation which might have been expected to take place in this year beyond all others, in consequence of the extra use of post horses which a general election would necessarily occasion.

*The question was put and the original motion carried. The bill was there fore read a second time, and committed for the ensuing Friday.*

APRIL 29.

## LOTTERY BILL.

*Mr. Rose brought up the new lottery bill, and, as soon as he had presented it, stated to the house that the only new clause in the bill was a clause to subject the printers of newspapers to a penalty of fifty pounds for each offence, in case they advertised any illegal shares. The bill having been read a first time, and ordered to be read a second,*

MR. SHERIDAN rose and declared that, in his opinion, it was a most extraordinary clause; nor could he possibly conjecture how it was to be carried into effect. He supposed the clause provided proper counsel for the printers to consult as to what was or what was not a legal share; or perhaps itself gave a definition of that important point; because, without either the one or the other, he saw not how printers could avoid incurring the penalty, although they might not mean to offend against the law, for they could have no more interest in advertising an illegal share than a pamphlet which, upon perusal, turned out to be a libel, or any other matter in itself illegal; and it was well known that in such cases the subjecting the printer to a penalty was a principle equally novel and oppressive; and, therefore, a principle which materially concerned the liberty of the press. Mr. Sheridan proposed to have the clause printed.

*Mr. Rose answered, that the hon. gentleman might recollect that it never had been usual to print a single clause of any bill; and in the present case it was wholly unnecessary, as the clause in question was but short, and contained on the one side of a single half sheet of paper—the hon. gentleman, therefore, might at one reading make himself master of its contents.*

Mr. Sheridan moved to have the whole bill printed.

*Mr. Pitt observed, that it was altogether unusual to print such bills as that in question, nor could he see the smallest occasion for it.*

Mr. Sheridan contended that the new clause might cramp and affect the press; but it could not be considered as a regulation to prevent gambling.

*The motion was negatived without a division.*

## EXCISE DUTIES ON TOBACCO.

*The order of the day for receiving the report of this bill being read,*

Mr. Sheridan observed that the hon. gentleman opposite to him had expressed himself so strongly on the re-commitment, that it was necessary he should take some notice of his argument; but having lately experienced a considerable share of indulgence



from the house, they might be assured he would not trespass long upon their patience. The hon. gentleman had spoken with pathos on the trial by jury ; and yet, he concluded with saying, it was not his intention to vote for the opportunity on which he might move to introduce the very point he recommended. Whenever he heard of a trial by jury being applied to the excise of tobacco, or any other single article excised, he always suspected it was thrown out as a lure and a decoy to attract attention, and draw the eyes of the house away from the main consideration. Professions of regard for that old-fashioned trial could only be proved in an old-fashioned manner—not by words but by deeds. The hon. gentleman had said a great deal about trial by jury, and, nevertheless, declared he would not vote for the re-commitment. He would leave it to the house and the country to judge of the sincerity of the hon. gentleman's professions, who contradicted them by his conduct. For his part, he should never think any gentleman sincere who did not oppose every extension of the excise laws, till the trial by jury was universally adopted in all cases of excise. If the hon. gentleman was sincere, he supposed that he would bring in a clause for a trial by jury at the third reading. Though not quite consistent with order, he must make some reply to an observation of the hon. gentleman, founded on what he said in a former debate ; but he conceived it could not be more irregular in him to reply to it, than it had been in the hon. gentleman to introduce it. The hon. gentleman had talked of his argument respecting the permitting the board of customs to appoint their own officers—

*The speaker called to order, and told Mr. Sheridan that he had already been out of order in questioning the sincerity of the honourable members.*

Mr. Sheridan said, with all due submission, when he talked of an hon. member's sincerity, as a public man holding a public argument, and did not advert to any part of his private character, he conceived he was strictly in order.

*The speaker answered, that to question in that manner went to question the motives on which the gentleman acted, and nothing could be more unparliamentary.*

Mr. Sheridan now referred to a former bill, relative to trial by jury in all excise cases ; which the hon. gentleman, he observed, must know, as he had a principal hand in it. The bill contained many excellent provisions, which were never executed. After animadverting upon that bill, Mr. Sheridan pointedly ridiculed

what Mr. Beaufoy had said relative to the distinction between the land officer, and the officer upon water, remarking that he supposed he was to consider the latter as a kind of amphibious animal—a sort of web-footed exciseman, who was the only corrupt officer; whereas, in his opinion, the officer on land was full as liable to temptation as when he was afloat. Mr. Sheridan next directed his arguments against the chancellor of the exchequer; and contended, that by his having admitted that this was the same question as that brought forward before, and declaring he agreed to the principles laid down by his right hon. friend, he, in fact, admitted, the tobacco act was neither explained nor amended by the present bill. He said it was evident that the bill afforded the manufacturers no sort of relief whatever. The bill, he said, permitted the manufacturers to have a liquid dye necessary to the manufacture, but it forbade them to have the ingredients to make it; which was just like letting a painter make a green colour, but forbidding him the use of blue and yellow.

The bill of indulgence, as the right hon. gentleman had termed it, was a mere mockery; and the arguments respecting the house of Sales and Pollard, and the decreases and increases, were unfair and fallacious.

*Mr. Beaufoy and Mr. Pitt followed.*

Mr. Sheridan rose again to controvert Mr. Pitt's argument, and an altercation of some continuance took place; the gentlemen on the one side of the house repeating the charge relative to what had been said about increases, connected with the names of Sales and Pollard in a former debate, and the gentlemen on the other side as often denying it.

*Mr. Pitt and Mr. Sheridan were both upon their legs several times.*

*At length the speaker put an end to the dispute by calling Mr. Sheridan to order.*

*The house divided—ayes (for the commitment) 73; noes 141.*

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APRIL 30.

EXCISE DUTIES ON TOBACCO.

*The order of the day being read, Sir Watkin Lewes moved to bring up a clause affording an optional right of a trial by jury, or by the commissioners.*

MR. SHERIDAN remarked, that the right hon. and learned gentleman (the attorney-general) had gone into an elaborate



praise of trial by jury, in the very moment he was endeavouring to persuade the house to reject a clause calculated to extend the benefit of that mode of trial to a very numerous description of subjects ! This was of a piece with the general conduct of those who supported every extension of the excise laws ;—they admitted them to be an exception to the constitution—they declared them an evil repugnant to principles of personal freedom, and they, nevertheless, voted for them. The right hon. and learned gentleman had stated four cases in which the defendants had obtained verdicts against the crown ; and one of them, he said, was a cause tried against a person who was a maker of smugglers. That men were made smugglers, and not born such, he was ready to admit ;—but he must contend, that men were made smugglers by act of parliament, and in that manner only. The right hon. and learned gentleman, amidst the extraordinary praises he had been so lavish in bestowing on juries had said, that in this case of the maker of smugglers, though he and all the court were much surprised at it, the jury had found for the defendant ; but that, although he considered the judgment as capricious, he was glad of it, as it proved the independency of the jury. That was rather a singular mode of panegyriizing juries, because he could not conceive that a jury being independent of all regard to evidence, truth and justice was a sort of independence very much to their credit. The house, Mr. Sheridan trusted, would do him the justice to recollect, that when he lately had occasion to discuss the question of the excise laws at some length, he had declared that, with respect to applying the trial by jury to the single instance of excise on tobacco, if that idea was thrown out by way of lure or decoy, he should resist it ; not thinking the trial by jury a desirable matter, unless a previous revisal of the excise laws was entered upon, with a view to a general reform of that system. This was his opinion upon the subject ; but the clause which had been moved, having for its object the applying the trial by jury to the excise on tobacco, he certainly could not hesitate a moment as to his acceptance of the offer.

*On the question being put, the house divided—ayes 22 ; noes 100.*

#### POST-HORSE FARMING BILL.

Mr. Sheridan contended that the produce of the duty, since it had been farmed out, was not greater than it might reasonably

have been expected to have been, had the collection been continued in the hands of the commissioners of stamps. Mr. Sheridan went into a variety of calculations and arithmetical statements for the purpose of showing that eleven thousand pounds were the utmost that could be said to be the surplus of the produce of the duty for the year 1789, over the produce for the year 1788.

*The bill was committed.*

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MAY 3.

AFFAIRS OF THE EAST-INDIA COMPANY.

*Mr. Boughton Rouse (according to order) reported from the committee of the whole house—to whom it was referred, to consider of theseveral accounts and papers which had been presented to the house in February and March last from the directors of the East India Company—the resolutions which the committee had directed him to report to the lords, which he read in his place and afterwards delivered in at the table. On the question, “that the resolutions be read a second time,” Mr. Tierney rose, and moved, “that the report be re-committed;” declaring his reasons for doing so were founded upon a partial representation, comprehending only one part of the company’s affairs, and that if agreed to by the house, they might mislead the public, and persuade individuals to embark their property on what would appear to be good security with a growing profit; whilst, in reality, it was only a delusive and ruinous speculation.*

MR. SHERIDAN expressed himself astonished at the declaration of the right hon. and learned gentleman (Mr. Dundas) that he did not hold himself accountable to the house for the whole state of the company’s affairs. The right hon. and learned gentleman, he conceived, had not in this declaration done himself justice, because he held in his hand a speech of the right hon. and learned gentleman, which he could rely on, as it was too correct for a newspaper report, though those reports were frequently very accurate. In fact (Mr. Sheridan said), he considered the speech to have been furnished by the right hon. gentleman himself, and a few printed for the use of his friends. He had, however, the good fortune to procure a copy. He then read a paragraph from the printed speech in question, in which Mr. Dundas stated, “when ever any person came forward, as he then did, to move for leave to bring in a bill enabling the company to increase their capital by the loan of a million, he was bound to state their entire situation;” and yet (observed Mr. Sheridan), notwithstanding the ex-



cellent doctrine contained in the paragraph I have read, the right hon. gentleman now says, "I show you only part of the question, and this shall be the political state of the company's concerns." Mr. Sheridan insisted, that the house had not a fair account, unless they had an account of the commercial as well as of the territorial affairs of the company. Mr. Sheridan took notice of a part of Mr. Baring's speech, who had asked somewhat ironically, if Mr. Tierney's representations were just, whether the company ought to approach government and beg them either to suffer the company to give up their charter, or to allow them a premium for carrying on a disadvantageous trade? That irony might sound well, and it might be true that the trade was a disadvantageous one; but, nevertheless, there were reasons which might make it worth the company's while to carry on a losing trade. The hon. gentleman, he observed, had said, that the four millions which the company had borrowed, were sunk in the China trade; and therefore, he considered it as no debt; that being the case, Mr. Sheridan said, he wished to know whether the tea trade had been a profitable or a disadvantageous branch of commerce? and as they were to have a discussion on the subject of the commutation act previously to the conclusion of the session, he should postpone, until that period, his remarks upon the subject.

Mr. Sheridan rose again to entreat the house, and especially the right hon. gentleman opposite to him (Mr. Pitt), seriously to attend to the act of 1783, enabling the treasury to assist the East India Company, by suffering them to raise money on exchequer bills for £300,000. It appeared to him (Mr. Sheridan said) that the right hon. gentleman and the lords of the treasury had acted in direct violation of the law. He explained this by showing that the conditions of the bill expressly were, that the company were to repay the money before they appropriated any of their receipts to other purposes; whereas the right hon. gentleman had suffered the company to pay off part of their debt claimed by government (but not acknowledged by the company), and had let them evade the payment of the money raised under the act in question. Now as that gave the right hon. gentleman and the lords of the treasury no discretionary powers respecting the debt, he could not but consider it as a collusion on the part of the right hon. gentleman, in order to swell the yearly amount of his budget. He desired, therefore, to ask by what authority

the right hon. gentleman had continued to countenance such a collusion.

*Mr. Pitt said he was not prepared to answer that question, nor could from so sudden a declaration say whether any subsequent act of parliament had given the treasury any discretionary authority or not. He would allow that the question was important, and if the hon. gentleman thought it a matter fit for separate discussion he would be ready to meet it whenever it should be brought forward, certainly conceiving that the present was by no means a proper time for it.*

Mr. Sheridan observed, that one reason why he urged it then was, that the debt had been inserted year after year in the statement of the company's accounts.

*Mr. Pitt answered, that if there was any collusion on either side it was rather extraordinary that the debt should have been publicly stated year after year.*

Mr. Sheridan replied it was true that the debt was stated, but always crossed out of the account before the account had been presented to the house.

*Mr. Baring declared, that he really did not recollect how the matter of the exchequer bills stood.*

*At length the question was put, "That the report be re-committed," when it was negatived. The resolutions were then read a second time and agreed to.*

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MAY 10.

SIR BENJAMIN HAMMET'S MOTION RELATIVE TO THE SENTENCES  
OF BURNING WOMEN CONVICTED OF CERTAIN CRIMES.

*Sir Benjamin Hammet stated, that it having been his official duty to attend on the melancholy occasion of seeing the dreadful sentence put in execution, he had then designed to bring in a bill to make some alteration; but he did not choose to venture the measure till he had consulted and received the approbation of some high authorities in the law, which was now the case. The judgment of burning alive, applied to women for certain crimes, was the savage remains of Norman policy, and disgraced our statutes, as the practice did the common law. He maintained that the sheriff who did not execute this sentence of burning alive, was liable to a prosecution; but, he thanked Heaven, that there was not an Englishman to be found whose humanity did not exalt itself above the severity of the sentence, and who did not choose to run the risk rather than attend to the letter of the judgment. He repeated the sentences verbatim which were given upon men and women for the same crime.*

UPON MEN.

*"To be drawn upon a hurdle to the place of execution, and there to be hanged by the neck till he is dead.*

UPON WOMEN.

*"To be drawn upon a hurdle to the place of execution, and there to be burned with fire till she be dead."*



*He desired the house to consider the influence of the husband upon his wife; and that in many other crimes the laws made no provision for it. At this moment a woman lay in Newgate convicted for coining; but the learned recorder had not made his report, and the sheriff applied to him that morning expressing his feelings upon the occasion, and rejoicing in the hopes that the bill might pass into a law. He desired to remind the house, that it was proved by experience that the shocking punishment did not prevent the crime. Formerly the men were sentenced to be quartered, in addition to their other punishment, and he supposed it arose from delicacy that the women were to be burnt; but now, the sentence of quartering was not the judgment, and all for which he contended was, that women should not receive a more dreadful punishment than the men, who might influence the women to the commission of the crime. He would use no more arguments. He trusted that the bill wanted not the force of oratory or eloquence to cause it to be received; for he had no doubt but the house would go with him in the cause of humanity. He would not, therefore, trouble the house longer, but begged to be permitted to move for leave to bring in a bill "for altering the sentence of burning women attainted and convicted of certain crimes, and substituting other punishments in lieu thereof."*

MR. SHERIDAN wished the motion to be worded more generally, and that the description of the bill might extend to all women convicted of high or petty treason; declaring, that if it should be necessary to narrow the object of the bill, there would be sufficient opportunities of doing so in the committee, and at different stages of the progress of the bill.

*The motion passed without amendment.*

#### SUPPLY.

*Mr. Pitt rose to move a vote of credit for a million, to enable his Majesty to act as the exigency of affairs might require. With the large sums already voted, and the use of the money which his Majesty would then have at command, a vote of credit for a million would be sufficient. Mr. Pitt explained the nature of some claims which the merchants and others who had property in Georgia, so far back as 1783, fairly had upon government, in consequence of that province being ceded by the treaty of peace; and he concluded with moving,*

*"That it is the opinion of this committee that a sum not exceeding one million be granted to his Majesty, to enable his Majesty to take such measures, and to make such augmentation to his forces by sea and land as the exigencies of affairs may require."*

*"That the sum of £49,556 17s. 6d. be granted to his Majesty for the relief of merchants, and other persons, interested in lands within the late province of Georgia."*

*The motion having been read a first and second time, on the question, "That the chairman do report the same to the house,"*

MR. SHERIDAN remarked, that the right hon. gentleman (the chancellor of the exchequer), when he stated his observations on

his Majesty's message to the house, had expressed a hope that we should still be able to accommodate the matters in question between the courts of Madrid and Great Britain, without being driven to the necessity of going to war; a hope in which they must all most cordially concur. But although it was right to follow up their address to his Majesty of last week with a vote of supply, and not leave the address as a mere matter of profession, Mr. Sheridan said, he wished to know if, in the event of war being commenced, the right hon. gentleman would find it necessary to have a committee of supply again?

*The two resolutions passed.*

LOAN TO THE EAST-INDIA COMPANY.

Mr. Sheridan, adverting to the loan of exchequer bills for £300,000 to the East-India Company, remarked, that possibly the right hon. gentleman might have been otherwise employed for the last two or three days, than to have had an opportunity of attending to the subject; if not, he should be glad to know how the right hon. gentleman found the matter upon inquiry.

*Mr. Pitt answered, that he really had not had an opportunity of attending to the circumstance; but if the right hon. gentleman conceived that there was anything in it on which he ought to make a motion, the most regular way would be to submit one on the subject.*

Mr. Sheridan said, that he would submit one on the subject on the ensuing Friday.

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MAY 11.

POST-HORSE DUTY BILL.

*The order for the third reading of this bill being read,*

MR. SHERIDAN again moved his clause to oblige the farmers of the duty to declare upon oath the annual produce of their respective districts. Without some clause to this effect, the public, he contended, could not reap the full advantage of the bill, because the produce of the several districts being known only to those who farmed them, no advance could be expected on the price at which they were first let. The farmers were to be considered in the light of public accountants, and might fairly be called on to give an account of money collected from the public.



*Mr. I. H. Broune contended, that it was impossible to call upon men to declare on oath what they had a strong temptation to conceal, more especially under circumstances which rendered it extremely difficult to discover whether they had declared the truth or not, so as to found an indictment for perjury. He could not consider the farmers in the light of public accountants, nor agree to an inquisition into private property. And, finally, would not bid high for that of which they were obliged to give an account upon oath.*

Mr. Sheridan said, the bill empowered the farmers to call upon all persons engaged in letting post-horses to answer on oath, who had a very great temptation in the way of interest to swear falsely. If the hon. gentleman's objection went merely to a wanton use of oaths, he ought to object to the bill entirely. The farmers must, necessarily, be considered as public accountants. The oath proposed was, at least, a safer oath than any other authorized by the bill; and without it, or something equivalent to it, the public would not reap the full benefit of the bill.

*The question was put, and the clause rejected without a division.*

#### TRADE TO NOOTKA SOUND.

Mr. Sheridan said that he had a motion to make, which he knew not whether he had worded properly; but the purport of it was, to obtain information whether the trade to Nootka Sound, and the settlement forming, or intended to be formed there, was undertaken under the sanction and authority of government, or merely as an enterprize of private persons.

*Mr. Pitt wished the motion to be postponed till the information promised in his Majesty's answer to the address could be laid before the house. Licences to trade to Nootka Sound had been granted; and he knew of no authority for that or any other purpose but such as those licences contained.*

Mr. Sheridan remarked, that what the house had now heard, that the settlement was a private enterprize, was very material.

*Mr. Pitt contended, that whether the settlement was or was not a private enterprize, there could be no doubt that it was incumbent on the honour of the country to demand satisfaction for any insult or injury offered to its subjects, whether in their private capacity of traders, or acting under the more immediate sanction of government.*

Mr. Sheridan declared, that if the right hon. gentleman meant to insinuate, that he did not think the country bound in honour to protect every subject from insult or injury, he had put a construction on the words which they would not bear.

*The motion was postponed.*

## MR. HASTINGS'S TRIAL.

*Mr. Burke called the attention of the house to a motion he had to offer upon the subject of the protracted continuance of the trial. After some observations upon the petition presented by Mr. Hastings to the house of lords, he adverted to what he conceived to be the principal causes of its not having been brought to a speedier conclusion; the first was the determination of the house of lords, obtained at the instance of Mr. Hastings, to proceed upon all the articles of charge before they came to any discussion; another was, that the counsel for Mr. Hastings had insisted upon reading papers at large, instead of extracts; but what occasioned, perhaps, the greatest delay was, that the managers were not made acquainted with the grounds and extent of the principles on which the decisions of the house of lords were made respecting the admissibility of evidence. This made it impossible for them to know how far the next questions which they intended to put might, or might not, militate against those principles. He concluded by moving the following resolution:—"That the house taking into consideration the interruptions occasioned by the occupations of the judges and the house of lords; as also the impediments which have occurred, or may occur in the course of the trial of the impeachment of Warren Hastings, Esq., doth, without meaning to abandon the truth or importance of the charges, authorise the managers of their said impeachment to insist only upon such, and so many of the said charges as shall appear to them the most conducive to obtaining speedy and effectual justice against the said Warren Hastings."*—Second, "*that the commons of Great Britain in parliament assembled, from a regard to their own honour, and from a duty which they owe to all the commons of Great Britain, in whose name, as well as in their own, they act in the public prosecutions by them carried on before the house of lords, are bound to persevere in their impeachment against Warren Hastings, late governor-general of Bengal, until judgment may be obtained upon the most important articles in the same.*"

*Mr. Pitt did not oppose the motion.*

*The master of the rolls thought it would be more advisable to make the motion general, and to follow that precisely which had been adopted in the case of Lord Macclesfield. He read a copy of that motion, and though he confessed it was not so ably worded as the right hon. gentleman's, yet he conceived it preferable, as there was no occasion to assign a reason, the doing of which would be liable to comment.*

*Mr. Sheridan contended, that the difference of the circumstances of the two impeachments made the distinction between the two motions sufficiently clear. In the impeachment of the Earl of Mansfield, the managers were armed with the authority in question, in the first instance; it was therefore unnecessary to assign a reason. The hon. and learned gentleman should observe, that in the present impeachment, they had now passed almost three years without obtaining their object. On which special account it was necessary to assign a reason for giving fresh au-*



thorities to the managers. Nor did his right hon. friend's motion appear to him in any part of it objectionable; it conveyed no insinuation; for surely it was no insinuation to state that the judges were obliged, in discharge of their official duty, to leave town, and do the business of their several circuits.

*The house divided : ayes 48 ; noes 31.*

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MAY 14.

EXCHEQUER BILLS LENT TO THE EAST-INDIA COMPANY.

MR. SHERIDAN, adverting to the exchequer bills lent to the East-India Company, remarked that he should take up but a short time of the house in the discussion of a subject rather of a dry nature, but which nevertheless would afford some information, and was indeed very interesting to those who duly considered the importance of preserving the national credit. New events had lately made other matters give place, and those new events had produced new doctrines which, in the eyes of some, might render his motion objectionable. He declared, however, that he was not one of those who, in the first moment of a probability of hostilities, thought the minister entitled to that unlimited confidence which they had lately heard so much of, as well as that an inquisitive house of commons was the worst enemy the country could have. Neither did he think that, at such a moment, every thing of a nature distinct from the important topic which rendered military preparations necessary, was to give way, and that they were to take it for granted the minister had so much upon his hands that he ought not to be expected to listen to any other business whatsoever. There were matters certainly, which, though unconnected with the subject that had so much engaged the public attention within the last ten days, were very essential objects of consideration, and well worthy the attention of that house. That which he intended to bring forward was one of them. It was impossible to mention the matter without recurring to what he had so often complained of—to the mode of temporizing which the right hon. gentleman had adopted ever since 1786, instead of fairly stating to the public what the real situation of their finances was, that system of concealment for the sake of making the public believe their affairs were better than they really were, and then having recourse to expedients from time to

time, to enable the business of government to be carried on. That this appeared to be the system pursued (Mr. Sheridan said) was an opinion which he would still maintain, notwithstanding the use that might be made of it, and the clamour that might be raised against all who thought as he did, and who might be represented to the public as holding language dangerous and depreciating. It might be said that when it ought to be the common interest of all to raise the spirits of the people, by representing their affairs in the best light, they were running them down to the disadvantage of the public, and the encouragement of our enemies. None of those imputations, Mr. Sheridan declared, would ever make him shrink from what he thought his duty. Be it peace, or be it war, he would continue to state things as they really were, not having a doubt upon his mind but that by so doing, by publishing to that house, to the people at large, and consequently to the whole world, our real situation, we should be best enabled to extricate ourselves out of any difficulty or embarrassment which might arise, and best secure the national safety. Concealment might serve a temporary purpose, but in the end the consequence must prove mischievous in the extreme. If parliament were not to look into the state of their affairs from time to time, they had better, instead of voting a million, rely at once on the minister for the business of parliament, let him make war, conduct it just as he thought fit, grant him whatever he asked for, and when it was ended, let him say he would settle the accounts when it suited him, and in the manner he liked best. Mr. Sheridan at length proceeded to the main object of his motion, and desired that the clause of the act of 1783, which contained the condition of the public's paying off the exchequer bills, if not paid by the East India Company by the 5th of April, 1786, might be read. This being read, he observed, that he had agreed entirely with the hon. baronet (Sir Grey Cooper) behind him, who had first drawn his attention to the subject, and whose observations were at all times well worthy attention, that in suffering those exchequer bills to remain unpaid to this day, government had acted directly contrary to law. He mentioned the two sums of £300,000 and £200,000 paid into the exchequer in the year 1789 and 1790, by the East India Company, on account of demands made on them by government, but not acknowledged by themselves, and contended, that out of



those sums the exchequer bills in question ought to have been paid off; for the act of parliament expressly stated that, if the East India Company were to fail in their engagement, the public should take it upon themselves, and the exchequer bills should become a charge upon the sinking fund. He asked had this been done? Certainly not; and therefore he asserted that the law was broken by government as it had been by the East India Company. The bank also, in continuing the loan, set a dangerous precedent, and, if followed, it would lead ultimately to a national bankruptcy. There were three parties in this business, the East India Company, who was the borrower of the money; the public, who gave the security; and the bank, who advanced it; but the right hon. gentleman was personally interested in it, because it was his duty to see that the act was complied with, and the money paid before the 5th of April, 1786. When, on opening his budget, the right hon. gentleman had stated that he had taken the £300,000 paid by the East India Company for duties as part of the income of the year, he could not fairly say he had gained £300,000, but that he had borrowed so much. All the confusion which had occurred in this business, and all the difficulties which the right hon. gentleman had found it necessary for four years back to encounter (Mr. Sheridan maintained), had been owing to what he had so often lamented—to the right hon. gentleman's fatal and unfortunate error in not having made his stand in 1786, and brought forward the affairs of the country as they really were, and taken the proper and effectual means of making the national income equal to the expenditure, either by an adequate reduction of the establishments, or by having recourse to some mode of increasing our income. It was the more to be lamented that the right hon. gentleman had not done so in 1786, because, perhaps, in the annals of the country, no minister ever could have taken such a step under such peculiar advantages. The right hon. gentleman at that time had an opposition calling upon him to take such a step, and willing to support him in it, willing also, as far as an opposition could, to share in the responsibility of the measure; the right hon. gentleman had likewise the advantage of a confiding house of commons, and what was still a further advantage, it was well known to every person that the right hon. gentleman had not had the smallest share in having occasioned the burthens under which the people then la-

boured. Instead of having done what he had just described, the right hon. gentleman had kept back the true state of affairs, and ever since proceeded on a system of expedients. Mr. Sheridan declared, that in consequence of the situation of affairs, and from other considerations, he had changed his intended mode of proceeding, but he would read to the house five or six resolutions from which the house would, at one view, collect all the facts that formed the features of the business. (He here read six resolutions, stating that the East India Company had been enabled by parliament to borrow £300,000; that the public lent exchequer bills for that by way of collateral security to the bank of England; that the engagement was, that if the said bills were not discharged on or before the 5th of April, 1786, the amount of the bills was to become a charge upon the sinking fund, and to be provided for out of the first aids of the year which should be voted after the 5th of April; that the bills were not discharged before that day, and that they yet remain undischarged. Those resolutions (Mr. Sheridan said) he had intended to move, but he would content himself with moving a single one, to which he conceived there could be no sort of objection, as it would strengthen the hands of the right hon. gentleman, and enable him to manage future loans with the bank with greater ease. He then moved, "that the East India Company do pay off the exchequer bills for £300,000 lent them in 1783, on or before the 5th day of January next."

Mr. Sheridan rose again and contended that the bank, by their conduct, had gone near to forfeit their charter. He read an abstract from the act of William and Mary, to prove that the bank had no right to suspend a demand on government, through a convention with the treasury; and he remarked that the law of the land expressly forbade the bank from making any loan to government without the knowledge and approbation of parliament. If by such an indirect way the bank could assist government, and evade the act of King William, that act would become nugatory, and one of the first and leading principles in the bill of rights undermined and subverted. The East India Company never could pay the amount of the exchequer bills to the bank. By the statute the money was bound to be paid into the exchequer, and there to be reserved till the bills were brought and cancelled as discharged.



*Mr. Pitt appealed to the chair and to the house whether, under the pretence of speaking in explanation, it was regular for the hon. gentleman to make a series of new assertions totally foreign to the subject in discussion, and which must necessarily call assertions in contradiction from him, and unavoidably create another debate.*

Mr. Sheridan rose again, and after a few more words was called to order by the chair. Mr. Sheridan then observed, that after what had passed, he was determined to move all the resolutions which he had read to the house.

*The question was put, in consequence of the previous question having been moved, "That the question on this resolution be now put," when the house divided; ayes 39; noes 70. The previous question was also carried on the other resolutions, three excepted.*

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MAY 17.

SIX WEEKS' LICENCE BILL.

*Mr. Rose moved several resolutions. After they had been all carried,*

MR. SHERIDAN complained against the practice of receiving reports on the same day that the committees sat; and the system of procrastination which he charged ministers with pursuing, in respect to the public business this session, in like manner as it had been customary for them to do in every session, declaring that their system clearly was to put off every great and interesting concern till it was impossible to procure either the necessary attendance or attention to the subject. The mace had been on and off the table every quarter of an hour the whole day, as if they were at boys' play, instead of being engaged in the dispatch of serious and important public business. He asked what their constituents would think of such conduct, and so shameful a mode of proceeding?

*Mr. Rose declared that he never intended to move that the resolutions should be reported that day, it being directly contrary to the established practice of the house to receive a report of any resolutions relative to duties imposed on the subject, on the same day on which they were voted. With regard to the imputed system of procrastination, he utterly denied that any such system was pursued. The public business had, throughout the session, been brought forward as early, and with as much expedition as, in the nature of each case, was practicable. In respect to the mace having been frequently taken off the table that day, and reports of committees made immediately, he had only moved that one report of a committee of the day be received, and that was on the subject of a bill to which there was not, as he understood, the smallest objection—the bill for the relief of the coast-*

ing trade. *As to the number of the bills introduced, he had, he believed, had the honour to introduce three, and no more; and those were, as their titles sufficiently showed, bills which could not, in the nature of things, have been introduced sooner.*

Mr. Sheridan contended that the bill just alluded to was as important as, and perhaps the most important of, any one bill introduced that session. What he complained of was, that a bill of such magnitude had not been introduced when the house was more fully attended, and when gentlemen could pay it the consideration it deserved. He was glad however, late as it was, that some notice was at length about to be taken of the numerous petitions on the table, complaining of a noble lord's (Hawkesbury) famous manifest bill; and that some redress was to be afforded to those who suffered under its oppressions, which he understood were great. The hon. gentleman had observed that he had only brought in three bills that day. He, perhaps, had forgotten that a noble lord who had just left the house went away after having performed his task, and laid his pile of bills upon the table; that the chancellor of the exchequer had also introduced several; and therefore, though it had been left to the hon. gentleman last of all to throw in his share, and add to the heap, the number collectively was great, and considering the period of the session, he must repeat it, an additional instance of the shameful system adopted by the present administration, of procrastinating the most important public business to the end of the session.

*Mr. Rose denied not only that the noble lord (Hawkesbury) had anything to do with the bill in question, though he had, deservedly, obtained great credit for his assistance in respect to another bill, but that the bill for the relief of the coasting trade was not at all connected with the Manifest Bill. The latter referred to ships employed in foreign trade, and not coasting vessels.*

*The resolutions were agreed to, and the report ordered to be received upon the morrow.*

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MAY 26.

## TONTINES.

*Mr. Pitt moved—"That the act of the 29 Geo. III. cap. 41 (relative to tontines), be read." He next moved, "That the house resolve itself into a committee on the said act." These motions were agreed to. Mr. Pitt observed that the tontine had originally been proposed as an experiment; and, at the time, it had appeared to him a reasonable expectation that it would have proved of equal advantage to the public and the subscribers. It had, however, turned out that this*



had not been the case ; and, although the tontine originally bore a premium, it had since been at a considerable discount, and if persisted in according to the original terms, the individuals who had taken the whole of it must sustain a very considerable loss. The plan he had to propose would, he was aware, appear rather complicated at first sight, but when examined and considered, he trusted that the mode of carrying it into execution and effect would be found easy and simple. It was not necessary for him in that stage of the business to go into a minute detail of the calculations on which his plan would be found to be practicable ; it would suffice for him generally to state the outline, which was to give those who held the shares of the tontine an option of exchanging it for long annuities, and to empower the commissioners of the treasury to nominate to the shares which might be vacant when the period of nomination to shares should expire, which would be in October next, and to hold the same for the public. By these means gentlemen would see that faith would be kept with the persons whose lives were already interested, the original subscribers would be rescued from the risque they at present ran, in consequence of a speculation which, *prima facie*, had undoubtedly been a laudable one, and the public itself would be no sufferer. Mr. Pitt concluded with moving a resolution, the purport of which was, to authorise the holders of shares in the tontine to have their share exchanged for an equal portion of long annuity, on application for that purpose to the head cashier of the bank.

MR. SHERIDAN observed, that he believed that he was justified in concluding that it had been evident to the house, on the right hon. gentleman's first statement of his design to relieve the original subscribers to the tontine, that it was a matter of very great nicety. It was likewise evident, from what he had just said, that the right hon. gentleman had changed his plan, and abandoned the ground he had first taken ; but he could not but think that the right hon. gentleman had over-stated the risque which the original subscribers had encountered ; it was true, that the tontine had been for some time at a discount, but it ought to be recollected, that when it first came into the market it bore a premium ; taking, therefore, both these matters into consideration, the subscribers might not have sustained so much loss as the right hon. gentleman seemed to wish to impress the committee with an idea of. In fact, the more they thought upon the business, the more the difficulty of doing equal justice would be found to be, and he feared that it must ultimately be acknowledged to be insurmountable. The right hon. gentleman had made three propositions ; first, that relief should be given to the original subscribers ; next, that the public should be no losers by affording that relief ; and lastly, that the present holders of shares should have the same advantages secured to them, as they had a right to look for when they were nominated to the said

shares. It was, he admitted, clearly made out, that the first object would be answered by the right hon. gentleman's plan—that the original subscribers would be relieved, and also that the public would not be losers; but it did not, Mr. Sheridan said, appear to him that the present holders of shares would have the public faith kept with them, or that they would remain in as advantageous a situation as they had a right to expect, considering the conditions of the tontine at the time when they subscribed for shares. Mr. Sheridan explained the grounds of his opinion by stating, that if the commissioners of the treasury were to nominate to such shares of the tontine as should be vacant in October, they naturally would not name bad lives, but the very best which they could select; and in that case the holders of shares, who might choose to keep their shares, would not stand the same advantageous chance as they would, in all probability, have stood, had lives been promiscuously nominated, according to the original plan, when some purchasers of shares would have nominated themselves, others their children, others their connections and friends, as their own views of their individual interests, their whim, their vanity, their self-love, or any other prevalent motive of their minds might have dictated, and regulated them in their choice.

*Mr. Pitt expressed his belief, that if the hon. gentleman had examined his own objection, he could not but be of opinion that he would find that it did not apply.*

Mr. Sheridan answered, that he had stated a difficulty, not an objection; and the more it was examined, the more insurmountable, he was convinced, it would be found. He then re-urged his argument; and after asserting, that unless each individual holder of a share of the tontine would come and signify his consent to the proposed plan, he should consider the holders of shares in general to be injured; he would reserve any further discussion of the subject till the bill should be before the house.

*The question was put, and the resolution agreed to.*

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MAY 28.

TONTINE BILL.

*The order of the day for the second reading of this bill having been moved to be discharged,*

MR. SHERIDAN expressed his hopes that he might, fortunately, make some impression upon the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt)



when he declared, that the more he considered the nature of the bill, the more he was convinced that the precedent would prove dangerous, and not to be reconciled to the great object of securing the original holders of shares in the tontine, who meant to adhere to their shares. If gentlemen would turn their attention to it, he was convinced they would see that it ought to be rejected, and therefore, he trusted that the right hon. gentleman would not attempt to move that the bill be committed before the ensuing Tuesday or Wednesday.

*Mr. Pitt imagined that the hon. gentleman had not been present in the house the preceding day, or he would have heard him state that, as he conceived, whatever objections there might be against the bill, they would go rather to the regulations it contained, and the application of the principle of the bill, than to the principle itself; he meant to move that it be committed the approaching Tuesday.*

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JUNE 2.

TONTINE BILL.

*The report of the committee on this bill having been brought up, the amendments were read a first and second time, and several new ones proposed.*

MR. SHERIDAN persisted in his idea, that if the situation of the original contributors to the tontine, and holders of shares were changed at all, no matter whether from good or worse, it was an insurmountable objection; and that, before the house adopted the principle of the bill, they ought to be assured that each individual, interested as he had described, gave his assent to the conditions which the bill tended to authorize and enforce. Mr. Sheridan proposed that the names of the subscribers who should, at the period of nomination, be found desirous of adhering to their shares, should be taken to fill up the vacancies in the several classes.

*Mr. Pitt contended that the hon. gentleman's proposition would, on the very grounds on which they had been so long arguing, be liable to the greatest objection of any, as, in that case, the original contributors to the tontine, and the holders of shares, must be deprived of the chance of running against the lives of others promiscuously nominated, and be forced to run against themselves.*

*At length the several new clauses and amendments were agreed to, and the bill, with the amendments, ordered to be engrossed, and read a third time.*

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DECEMBER 15.

## WAYS AND MEANS.

MR. SHERIDAN observed that, on the present occasion, he felt himself unusually happy to give the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) his sincere praise for the general outline of his plan, for the speedy extinction of the three millions necessary to be raised to pay off the expense of the late armament. He assured the right hon. gentleman that he had done no more than justice to that side of the house, in thinking that they would give their support to such a necessary measure. Whatever difference of opinion there might be on particular topics, whether some of them might think on the subject of that armament, either that it was not necessary, and that there had been no reason to have talked to Spain in so haughty and menacing a tone; whether other gentlemen might deem the armament necessary, but the satisfaction obtained inadequate, or whether others again might consider the conduct of the right hon. gentleman as spirited and proper, and that the convention was an excellent one, and likely to prove a source of endless advantage; let the contrarieties of opinion be what they might, the right hon. gentleman, he was persuaded, would find but one sentiment in the house on the subject of his proposed plan. And as those who sat near him had often stated, that nothing was so necessary as to meet the exigency of the moment in a firm, manly way, to look our difficulties at all times in the face, to bring them forward without disguise, and call upon the house to provide for them to their full extent; now, as the advice was taken, they would cheerfully assist in sharing the disagreeable task of imposing fresh burthens on the people, convinced as they were, that however the mode of incurring the expense might be wrong, the expense, once incurred, must be paid. He could have wished, however, that the right hon. gentleman had not stated part of his taxes as temporary taxes. He really feared the right hon. gentleman had not sufficiently considered the state of the revenue, or, he conceived, he never could have persuaded himself that after the taxes were once imposed they could be taken off. For his own part, he was anxious for an examination every year into the state of the public receipt and expenditure. He had taken the paper up, and saw that the present income of the country was

£15,800,000, including malt, land tax, &c., and the last year's expenditure, up to Midsummer last, amounted to £17,000,000; he lamented that one great object of resource was entirely overlooked—an economical attention to our expenditure and a reduction of our establishments; instead of this, with alliances, and under circumstances the most favourable to reduction, with a neighbouring nation who, by a change in their government, enjoyed the blessings of freedom, more inclined to be our friends than our enemies, and at a time of apparently perfect security, we were, year, after year increasing our establishments. As to the taxes proposed, the right hon. gentleman's situation was at present so difficult, that it was almost unjustifiable to oppose any taxes; but he really wished that before the right hon. gentleman thought of taking the £500,000 from the bank, he would consult the bank directors on that subject, because he feared the meddling with any money issued to pay the public creditor would affect the public credit. With regard to the comparison made by the hon. gentleman who spoke last, between the public and the bank, and a private individual and his banker, the hon. gentleman was totally mistaken; a private individual might certainly take his money from his banker's, and the reason why he might do so was, because the money was his own; but the money in the bank was, in fact, the property of the public creditor, and no other had a right to meddle with it. Another article which Mr. Sheridan thought objectionable as to a farther taxation, was malt.

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DECEMBER 16.

## WAYS AND MEANS.

*The Speaker put the question, "That the report of the committee be now brought up;" a debate ensued. Mr. Pitt said, he did not understand that there was any intention to object to the report being brought up, and the resolutions read a second time; he hoped, therefore, no gentleman would then divide the house. He subsequently declared, in answer to Mr. Fox, that he had not objected to going into the discussion, and taking the sense of the house. He was willing so to do; indeed, if any gentleman chose to combat any one of the resolutions, he had it not in his power to prevent it.*

MR. SHERIDAN remarked, that it was very kind in the right hon. gentleman to suffer them to do their duty; but, if the right hon. gentleman considered the matter rightly, he would see that



proceeding then, in the very first instance, to oppose the intended tax on malt was acting handsomely by him : because if it should appear that many gentlemen were against it, the sooner it was known the more time the right hon. gentleman would have to look for and provide a substitute for the tax on malt. Mr. Sheridan added, that there was always something alarming and suspicious in the rapidity with which the right hon. gentleman endeavoured to hurry his tax bills through the house year after year ; he ever would oppose that rapidity, and, in the present case, he would certainly meet it with his negative. The argument respecting the tax lay in a nut-shell. It was plain, as the public brewery (those who brewed for sale) were not to be affected, the whole weight and operation of the intended tax would fall upon the private brewery, and thereby very deeply attack and distress the poorer order of the people. So much would this be felt, that every county in the kingdom, he was persuaded, were time allowed, would petition the house, and instruct their representatives to oppose it. An hon. gentleman who spoke early (Mr. Duncombe), by the latter part of his speech, seemed to think that the lovers of beer all lived in Yorkshire. The hon. gentleman was mistaken ; many of them, Mr. Sheridan said, were to be found at Stafford, and he believed they were distributed with tolerable equality throughout the country. He should, therefore, think it his duty to oppose the resolution.

*The report was brought up, and the resolutions were read a first time and agreed to ; they were then read a second time, and a question put upon each severally. When Mr. Hatsell came to the resolution stating the new malt tax,*

*Mr. Powys objected to it, and desired to know whether Mr. Pitt meant to propose his bill to continue longer in force than one year ?*

*Mr. Pitt answered most certainly. He agreed that it would be desirable that the additional tax on malt should cease as soon as its expected produce could be spared ; and, therefore, he meant that it should cease as soon as £80,000 of exchequer bills should be paid off, which he computed would take place in about two years.*

Mr. Sheridan remarked, that however trivial the intended addition might prove, it must always be granted that a number of trifling augmentations aggregately swelled to a gross increase and an intolerable oppression. They had gone so far already, that another small matter of addition would turn the scale ; and, therefore, the attempt to make any addition ought to be resisted. With regard to the duration of the act, he repeated



his assertion of the preceding day, that the right hon. gentleman deceived himself in imagining the taxes would be temporary only ;—once passed, they must be permanent. The right hon. gentleman would find he could not do without them. The subject, of course, ought to be treated with great gravity and most deliberate attention. If the new taxes actually turned out more productive than was expected, they could tell from experience what would be the conduct of the right hon. gentleman ; what he had done already, there was reason to expect he might do again—make a most dangerous use of the surplus, and be guilty of the most blameable appropriation of it, by expending the money in effecting the purposes of a dissolution of parliament, or by increasing our peace establishments. Instead, therefore, of the bills being precipitated with the shameful rapidity which had characterised all the right hon. gentleman's measures of importance, that house ought to examine the state of our finances, and compare our actual receipt with our actual expenditure ; they would then find that the latter greatly exceeded the former ; and they would see, likewise, that the malt tax had fallen short considerably for the last year, which was the strongest proof of the impolicy of loading the article with an additional duty. Mr. Sheridan then read a paper from the table, exemplifying his statement ; according to which, taking the malt and land tax at £2,500,000, he made the expenditure exceed the income above a million ; and he asserted that Mr. Pitt had taken advantage of all the new taxes, to the amount of more than half a million, since the year 1786.

*Mr. Steele asserted, that Mr. Sheridan's history of taxes imposed since 1786 was erroneous from beginning to end.*

Mr. Sheridan declared, that he could not sit silent under the charge of having attempted to deceive the house ; and, therefore, he referred to the report of 1786 itself, and cited the articles of public income from that document, challenging a contradiction ; and saying, he should be sorry to have Mr. Steele pay the proffered penalty of his pledge (never opening his lips again), though he certainly would find that he must do it, if the house should insist on it, when the day of trial should arrive. Mr. Sheridan added, that nearly £400,000 had been raised by taxes since the report of 1786 was made.

*The house divided ; ayes 116 ; noes 45.*

DECEMBER 21.

## ADDITIONAL DUTY ON MALT BILL.

*The order of the day having been read for the second reading of the bill for laying an additional duty on malt;—it was moved “that the bill be now read a second time.”*

MR. SHERIDAN declared that, in his opinion, the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had not offered one argument of sufficient weight to refute the many strong objections which had been so forcibly urged by different gentlemen that day. An hon. gentleman (Mr. Drake) had spoken very feelingly, and painted scenes which had convinced him that the poorest people in the kingdom were those who stood most in need of friends in that house. Of the truth of that sentiment, Mr. Sheridan said, he had long been convinced, and he should be extremely happy to see the fact reversed. The hon. gentleman, however, had recommended it to the chancellor of the exchequer to give up the additional tax on malt, lest that, among the poorer orders of the people, the downfall of the minister should become a prevalent toast. As the people in the county, the chief town of which he had the honour to represent, would be very materially affected by the tax, Mr. Sheridan said, he had little doubt, if the right hon. gentleman persisted in obstinately adhering to it, that toast was most likely to be adopted and recorded on the pottery of Mr. Wedgewood. The hon. gentleman, he observed, had said, the tax was to be but temporary;—but malt was the very worst article that could have been chosen for a temporary tax, since the malt duty had, within the last two or three years, fallen considerably short of its produce. Formerly it raised £750,000, whereas, by the different oppressions imposed of late years through the medium of additional duties, the sum produced had, by degrees, sunk, year after year. As to the connection between the taxes and the subject of the convention, the right hon. gentleman must permit him to say, that when they were laying fresh burdens on the people, they, on that side of the house, who had all along argued against the cause and the consequences of the message to parliament last session;—who had contended that what had happened did not call for such high-toned language as had been used—that the subject of the quarrel did not justify the expenses and preparations which had been gone into and got into readiness; and that the convention



was the worst convention ever made ; they could not be expected to admit that the taxes proposed were to be received implicitly, and all objection smothered on account of that measure, which, having taken place, rendered new taxes indispensably necessary. With regard to a tax on dogs proposed by an hon. gentleman behind him (Mr. Coke), although what had fallen from that gentleman did credit to his disinterestedness, Mr. Sheridan said, he was persuaded such a tax was not practicable ; but there were, he had no doubt, other taxes to be found, which would prove less liable to objection, and at the same time would raise the deficiency which giving up the malt tax would occasion. For that, and the various objections which had been stated by different gentlemen, he really wished the right hon. gentleman would consent to forego the addition to the malt tax ; and, as he was thoroughly persuaded that when it was properly considered it would be seen in the light in which he had placed it, as a tax likely to be attended with many bad consequences, he had designed to submit a motion, "That the bill be read that day six months ;" but he would only move to amend the motion, by leaving out the word "now," and inserting the words "Monday, the 7th of February."

*The house divided—the numbers were, that the word "now" stand part of the question ; ayes 126 ; noes 91 ; the bill was then read a second time.*

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MARCH 22, 1791.

BILL RELATIVE TO UNRECEIVED DIVIDENDS.

MR. SHERIDAN contended against the provision in the bill which enabled the treasury, in case the sum left in the bank of England should be reduced below £100,000, to issue exchequer bills as a security to the public creditor. There were various strong arguments against this power. Constitutionally it was a dangerous power ; and as to the creditor, it was surely a bad commutation to substitute paper in the room of specie. By the original contract, the public creditors were to be paid in specie only. Specie is lodged in the hands of the bank for their payment ; and that specie is to be taken out of their hands, and exchequer bills placed in its stead. Exchequer bills might or might not be good payment. If the original bargain declared that even bank notes should not be considered as good payment,



it was a violent measure to force upon them that which the original bargain declared was not to be offered.

*The committee went through the bill, and the report was ordered to be received upon the ensuing Thursday.*

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APRIL 1.

CORN REGULATION BILL.

MR. SHERIDAN presented a petition from the trades' house at Glasgow, praying to be heard by counsel against the clauses which respect Scotland. He wished to be informed whether it was meant to alter the clauses complained of; because he understood such an intimation had been given to the petitioners by the promoters of the bill. If those claims were not altered, he should have to present a petition against them, signed by more than 20,000 persons.

*The petition was ordered to be referred to the committee on the bill, with an instruction that the petitioners be heard by counsel.*

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APRIL 11.

FINANCE COMMITTEE.

MR. SHERIDAN objected to the mode of appointing the finance committee, as putting it in the power of the minister to procure many of his own friends to decide on the truth of his own statements.

*Mr. Steele contended, that the appointment of a committee by ballot was unobjectionable, even on the ground stated by the hon. gentleman, as every member was at liberty to give in a list of such names as he thought proper.*

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APRIL 12.

MR. GREY'S MOTIONS AGAINST ANY INTERFERENCE IN THE WAR  
BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE PORTE.

*On the 29th of March a message was delivered to parliament from the king, stating, that the endeavours which he had used, in conjunction with his allies, to effect a pacification between Russia and the Porte, had been unsuccessful; and that the consequences which might arise from the further progress of the war being highly important to the interest of his Majesty and his allies, and to those of Europe in general, his Majesty judged it requisite, in order to add weight to his negotiation, to make some further augmentation in his naval force; and he relied on the zeal and affection of parliament for the defraying of such expenses as might be incurred by those additional preparations. The powers who had mediated in the con-*

vention of Reichenbach, had endeavoured in vain, on the conclusion of that treaty, to incline the Empress of Russia to peace with the Porte, on the same terms of the statu quo on which it had been determined that peace should be made between the Porte and Austria. The answer constantly returned by the empress to the pressing solicitations of the allies on this head was, that she would admit of no interference between her and the Turks, and should consult her own discretion in whatever related to that business, without submitting to the decision of any power whatever. Alarmed, however, at the strength of the allied powers, and above all at the new external relations, as well as internal situation of Poland, she offered to give up all her conquests on the Turks, excepting the town and dependencies of Oczakow, the country of the Oczakow Tartars, situated between the Bog and the Neister, the possession of which would, on the one hand, be a barrier to the irruptions of the Tartars into the territories of Russia; and, on the other, be open at some future period, more conspicuous than the present, to schemes of aggrandizement into the provinces, and the very heart of the Turkish empire. The King of Prussia, the immediate successor of Frederick the Great, had shown a prudent and just jealousy of the ambitious designs of Catherine, and by the formation of a close alliance with Poland, and other measures, wisely endeavoured to prevent her views of aggrandizement to all, or nearly all those measures already carried into execution, and to which Great Britain had given her countenance. We had also, in concert with Prussia and Holland, offered to mediate a peace in the east of Europe, soon after the fall of Oczakow, in 1788. We restrained Denmark from joining her arms to those of Russia for assisting the Swedes, and this with an avowed determination of supporting the balance of the north. In the summer following, in 1790, we made a new treaty with Prussia, a treaty of more than defensive alliance—of strict and perpetual union, in order to protect not only the interest of the two contracting powers, but the tranquillity and security of Europe. We had now a second time pressed our mediation on Russia, but pressed it in vain.

The Czarina not only persisted in her resolution to carry on the present war with the Turks, unless she should be permitted to dictate a peace on her own terms, but seemed to have denounced a war against another of our allies, Poland. So recently as 1789 she had given notice, that she should consider the new arrangements of the republics as a violation of her treaty and guarantee of a former engagement; and they prepared a plea for hostilities against that unfortunate country at a more convenient opportunity. The seeds of mutual jealousy and alienation had been sown between Great Britain and Russia, from the period that the czarina, in the time of our distress in the American war, took the lead in the armed neutrality, for the express purpose of resisting and reducing the naval power of this country. At the expiration of the commercial treaty between Russia and England, she not only declined to renew it, but obliged our merchants to pay, in duties, 25 per cent. more than what was exacted from other countries, though they gave half a year's credit for their exports, and were always a whole year in advance for their imports; and at the same time that she declined to renew any commercial treaty with us, she made one with France and another with Spain: in addition to which she entered with those two kingdoms into a quadruple alliance, plainly pointed against Great Britain. In a word, the Empress of Russia, flushed



with success, and most strongly fortified by treaties of alliance, had assumed a menacing attitude and frowning aspect which naturally produced a counter confederation, and excited throughout a great portion of Europe a spirit of jealousy, vigilance, and hostile resistance. Such was the state of Europe and such particularly that of this country in relation to Russia, at the moment when the message from his Majesty mentioned abroad was taken into consideration in the house of commons. The minister moved for an address on the occasion to his Majesty after the usual form. He supported the measure that was the object of the address, on the ground that we had a direct and important interest in the war between Russia and the Porte. Having entered into defensive alliances, which were admitted to be wise and politic, we ought to adhere to them: Prussia was our ally, and ought to be supported. The progress of the Russian arms against the Porte was alarming. Should the power of the Porte be farther humbled by its aspiring rival, Prussia would instantly feel it, and not Prussia alone, but all Europe—the political system of which might be shaken to its very foundation. On the other side, it was stated, that Prussia could not be endangered by any progress which the Russian arms could make in Turkey. The empress offered to cede all her conquests between the Neister and Danube; and proposed only to retain those which were situated between the Neister and the Don; but we insisted, that she should surrender all her conquests without a single exception. Our only ground of quarrel, therefore, with the empress, was her unwillingness to resign the tract of country above mentioned; which, although in general barren and unprofitable, was yet particularly desirable to her, as it contained the town of Oczakow, a place of much importance to the security of the Russian dominions. The address was carried by a majority of only 93. *Ayes* 228; *noes* 135.

By so numerous a minority Mr. Grey was encouraged to move, on the 12th of April, eight resolutions declarative of certain general and undeniable positions with regard to the interest of this country in the preservation of peace; the just causes, and unjust pretexts for war; facts that had appeared during the hostilities between Russia and the Porte, which did not seem immediately to involve the interest of Great Britain, or to threaten an attack on her possessions or those of her allies; and concluding, "that the expense of an armament must be burthensome to the country, and is, under the present circumstances, as far as the house is informed, inexpedient and unnecessary."

Mr. Sheridan remarked, that although he had several times presented himself in vain to the speaker's eye, he never felt it more necessary to trespass on the time of the house than at that moment; since, if ever there was a discussion which had been supported by the ablest arguments on one side, and with flimsy delusion opposed to them on the other, the cause discussed that day had been that cause. Not even any argument had been offered by the hon. baronet (Sir William Young) who spoke last, and who had traversed over all Europe; traced the history of the navigation and commerce of Russia from the earliest period; described her back frontiers, and all parts of her domi-



nions; and expatiated with as much familiarity concerning the Dnieper and the Danube, as if he had been talking of the Worcestershire canal, and pictured the empress as a female Colossus, standing with one foot on the banks of the Black Sea, and the other on the coast of the Baltic; yet, in spite of this fund of knowledge and ingenuity, all which the hon. baronet said did not amount to an argument against the motion, which, in his mind, was entitled to the smallest weight. From the right hon. gentleman opposite to him (Mr. Dundas), who was something like a minister, though not actually one, he expected to have heard important reasoning; but he presumed he had continued dumb, because if he had risen to speak it might have been suspected that he knew something, and thus have broken in upon that impenetrable mystery, and that magnificent silence which was to characterise the day, as far as regarded the conduct of those who alone could have afforded the house information, which they had a right to expect. Those who had risen to speak, like the hon. baronet who had just sat down, had professed either that they knew nothing of the cause of the armament, or had indulged in stating what they guessed to be that cause; thus the sum and substance of all the arguments against the motion had been professed ignorance on the one hand, or avowed conjecture on the other. If, then, they were to guess only from conjecture, and to argue from maxims drawn from maps and books, as the last hon. gentleman on the other side had done, could they possibly arrive at any satisfactory knowledge on the subject? Are maxims drawn from maps and books the cause for which an English house of commons are to plunge their country into a war, and waste the blood and treasure of their constituents? The reasons stated by different gentlemen, among their guesses of the causes of the war, were not more different than extraordinary. One right hon. gentleman had assigned something that looked like an argument, which might account for the right hon. chancellor of the exchequer's silence. He had stated that if his right hon. friend said any thing relative to the negotiation, it might put it out of the power of the negotiating parties to recede or retract what they had advanced, and thus render a war unavoidable. Did the right hon. gentleman then think it necessary to recede and retract any of the blustering menaces which he had made to Russia? If he did, it ought to be avowed, that an opportunity might be given

for such retraction. But that right hon. gentleman who had talked of the minister's receding, had also alluded to one matter as the cause of the war, from the bare mention of which he shrunk with horror; he had hinted at the armed neutrality and at the possibility of this being a fit opportunity for retaliating and revenging that measure. Were we then to go to war for so base a purpose as to give vent to the hatred and burning resentment which had been avowed to have rankled in our bosoms for so many years? He hoped not. The same right hon. gentleman had talked of the partition of Poland. Were they to resent that event at this crisis? If so, it ought to be avowed. But he would not believe that any of these could be the cause of the war. He would rather turn to the noble lord who had, in his opinion, acted in a more open and manly way, and rested the argument on its true ground. The noble lord had expressly avowed that he gave his consent on the ground of implicit confidence in the minister, and had even gone so far as to declare that he should consider it as criminal in the minister if he gave the house any information whatever on the subject. The ground of confidence had shifted materially since its first introduction three years ago. They had then heard of rational confidence; since that a greater degree of confidence had been talked of; and now the noble lord had avowed that he gave the minister implicit confidence. Had they not better at once appoint the right hon. gentleman dictator, and give him the power of making war and peace just as he thought proper? The noble lord who had, on a former occasion, shown himself very much attached to the ancient Greeks, had appeared not to be so much attached to the modern Greeks, and had said, "See what a faithless set of people these modern Greeks are!" In what, Mr. Sheridan asked, did their treachery consist? He knew of no such treachery; and he owned that he should rather have expected that the noble lord, with a classical indignation, would have lamented that the descendants of Demosthenes should not be orators, statesmen, and soldiers, but an unfortunate race of men, kept only to pamper the false taste and degraded appetites of the Ottoman court. So much out of humour had the noble lord proved himself to be with the modern Greeks, that he had been betrayed into a perfidy of quotation, and had quoted a Latin line, to his surprise, Mr. Sheridan said, when he had expected a line of Homer from him at least. With regard to what had been observed of that house in-



vading the prerogative of the crown, if they interfered with negotiations, he was, for one, always ready to confess, that the just prerogatives of the crown should be kept sacred; but those were no friends to the prerogative who should advise the exercise of it in the extreme, and endanger its proving obnoxious to that house. The best government under the practice of our constitution consisted in a wise blending and co-operation of the executive and legislative branches of it. The king certainly might, if he pleased, make what treaties he thought proper, and keep them from the knowledge of parliament, if he was so advised by his ministers; he might also make war and peace, and in doing that, confidence was reposed in those on whose shoulders, as a counterpoise, responsibility lay. But the moment they came to that house for support and assistance, confidence was at an end, and the hour of inquiry and control was arrived. Yet, what he wished to contend for was, that ancient, constitutional, and most useful function of a British house of commons, their capacity of advising the crown, and of being enabled, by a due application and exercise of their preventive wisdom to save the country from that expense and calamity into which they might otherwise be plunged, either by the terror of ministers, their imprudence, their neglect, or their corruption. If the house of commons was to be deprived of that important function, and was never suffered to exercise their preventive wisdom, their chief use, as a deliberative assembly, would be lost to the public, and the whole powers of that house would be reduced to two dry points—the power of the purse, and the power of impeachment. Thus, instead of consulting them as advisers of the crown, they would be reduced to the miserable condition of acting upon public measures in the last fatal instance, that of loading their constituents with the expense of them, when it might afterwards turn out that they were measures not fit to have been pursued; and in that case all that would be left for them to do would be to prosecute ministers. If the purpose of a message from the crown should be at any time to tell them that the enemy was at their doors, and therefore supplies must be granted, he certainly should first ask on whose account they were called upon, and how it happened that they had not before been apprized of the public danger? But he should grant the supplies on account of the necessity and exigency of the case. The hon. gentleman opposite to him had wondered that



they should speak of the proceedings in that manner as a novelty, and remarked that they were totally ignorant of parliamentary constitution if they did not know that it had been the practice of ministers, in similar cases, to ask for support and give no explanation at the time. Ignorant, indeed, he confessed they must be, if the case was so; yet he could not but imagine that the hon. gentlemen who were so ready to give their confidence blindly and implicitly, were themselves so confident that they ventured to quote precedents without ever having given themselves the trouble to look and see whether they would support their argument. It so happened that all the precedents, from the year 1700 downwards, were against them, and in favour of what he had just contended for. In the case of the war of 1700, there had been a desire of preserving the balance of power in Europe, and King William had applied to the house on the occasion. Mr. Sheridan read from the journals a message from King William, and the address of the house in answer. In the one the king states the purpose of his application, and calls for the advice of his commons; and in the other, the house tells his Majesty that they will give him their advice as soon as they are fully informed on the subject, and desire that all the treaties entered into by his Majesty may be laid before them, that they may be able to offer him their mature advice. It appeared from hence that King William, in the instance which he had read, did not think it beneath him to ask advice of the house of commons, and they had heard what the language of the house had been in return. As the hon. gentleman on the other side might not like a precedent so near the revolution, he would turn to another of a more recent period, that of 1734. So far from the ministers of that day calling for the confidence of parliament, the king placed a confidence in his parliament, and put the whole business into their hands. Mr. Sheridan declared that he could not but wonder that the house bore with patience the cant of responsibility which was preached to them by all who contended for confidence. They were perpetually saying, give ministers implicit confidence; have they not the responsibility? as if they considered responsibility as a perquisite of office, rather than the peril of their situation. If they felt the case properly, they would shrink from the bare mention of responsibility, instead of being eternally talking of it, and which convinced him that they considered responsi-

With regard to confidence, he declared that he should not give his confidence to ministers to treat with foreign courts, unless the first department of office, in which all our foreign negotiations lay, were rescued from the hands of a person who, to an overcharged conceit of his own abilities, added the rashness which always must attend inexperience, and placed in the hands of a man familiar with foreign courts, and possessed of dexterity and simplicity sufficient to enable him to discharge the duties of the office with skill and with success. By dexterity, he said, he did not mean that cunning which another person mistook for craft, and that craft for wisdom; he meant dexterity to discover and ward off the devices and intrigues of foreign ministers and others; and simplicity to follow the straightforward path of open manliness and plain dealing himself. He declared that he would leave it to the house to make the application of this contrast, but unless a department of so much importance, considering the present situation of foreign courts, were placed in such hands, it was impossible for him to give confidence at such a time to ministers; nor had they, in fact, any right to expect it from him, who had uniformly and openly resisted the right hon. gentleman's measures.

Mr. Sheridan next turned his attention to the conduct of the right hon. gentleman opposite him, respecting Holland in 1787, for which praise had, on all hands, been candidly allowed him. He declared that if the question was put to him, and he was asked if, as a single measure, he rejoiced at it? he should, without hesitation, answer, that he did not; because he never could rejoice at seeing the stock of liberty diminished; and, by our interference, that noble republic was again reduced to the miserable state of vassalage under which she had so long groaned; but, when he considered that it was probable at the time that Holland would have become a province to France (though subsequent events had since proved that it could not have been the consequence), he was ready to join in commending the conduct of the right hon. gentleman on that occasion. But if it were true that the recovering our connection with Holland was nothing more than a part of a system, and that the fortress of Oczakow were to be traced from the canal at Amsterdam, he should reprobate it in the strongest terms; he would fairly declare, however, that he did not believe that the right hon. gentleman had entertained an idea of any such system at the time. He suspected that



the right hon. gentleman's measures had carried him much farther than he had ever intended to go; and that the pretence of its having been a part of a predeterminate system, was nothing more than a salvo assumed for the purpose of covering the extraordinary conduct of the right hon. gentleman. Mr. Sheridan here descanted on the chance of our next year having fresh press warrants issued, and being called upon to arm, in consequence of our having formed an alliance between Poland and Prussia. He went through a summary of what had passed in the different courts of Stockholm and Madrid during the administration of Mr. Pitt, and imputed blame to him on the events of each. He also said, that among the evil consequences of the pernicious system arising out of the treaty with Prussia, it had fastened on us a concern with the Germanic league, and that we should be lugged in as parties to the measure. He declaimed against the system, and said, let us call it any thing but a system of peace; let us say it is a system of ambition, of vain glory, to see the offspring of the immortal Chatham intriguing in all the courts of Europe, and setting himself up as the great posture-master of the balance of power, as possessing an exclusive right to be the umpire of all, and to weigh out, in patent scales of his own, the quantity of dominion that each power shall possess. Was not the right hon. gentleman establishing a principle which would make it the interest of all India to act against us? Was he not attempting to stand forward as such a peace-maker, as the peace of all Europe would make it necessary to exterminate? Mr. Sheridan mentioned the conduct of Mr. Elliot in Sweden, and having stated what had passed there, he referred the house to the speeches of his Majesty, which had all told them that our court had continued to receive the strongest assurances from foreign powers, that there was no danger of our tranquillity being likely to be disturbed; and he desired them to compare what had happened from time to time. With regard to the revolution in France, he did not mean to go into the discussion of that subject; his opinion upon it remained fixed, and would continue the same; but there was one point which all mankind agreed in rejoicing at, as a consequence of the French revolution; and this was, that she could no longer go about intriguing, and setting the rest of the courts of Europe at enmity with each other. Were we, he asked, willing to take up the little, busy, tattling spirit of intrigue, that

worst part of the character of France, and run about producing fresh wars and fresh disturbances? He had not thought that any thing could have induced him to lament the loss of French enmity; but if such was to be the case, he should do so most seriously. He had hoped that what had happened in France would have served as a useful lesson, and that we should have had leisure to have improved by studying it.

*The house divided on the previous question; ayes, That Mr. Grey's motion be now put, 172; noes 252; majority for the previous question, 80.*

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APRIL 21.

QUEBEC BILL.

*The order of the day for the re-commitment of this bill having been read,*

MR. SHERIDAN observed, that as, on the present occasion, the number of members within the house was far from being considerable, he trusted that if the right hon. gentleman absolutely wished that the principles and regulations of the bill might become the subject of examination and discussion, he would postpone its consideration until a future and more convenient day. Indeed, the circumstance of his having fixed upon this day, immediately before the holidays, when the attendance of the house was unusually thin, for the re-commitment of the bill, had induced several members to believe that it was not his serious intention of bringing it on; and they had in consequence absented themselves, though they would otherwise willingly have been present. There was another reason why the consideration of the bill should be put off. The right hon. gentleman had, indeed, laid information upon the table, but he had not moved that it should be printed; and certainly, if he had intended that this information should have been perused, and considered by the members, he ought to have made the motion. Mr. Sheridan conceived that it should now be printed, and the Easter holidays would afford members an opportunity of taking it into consideration, so that they might be better prepared to state their opinions. There was still another reason why he considered delay as necessary, not only to the house, but to the right hon. gentleman. It was not till lately, he understood, that the very persons had not been consulted in this business who were most interested, and best qualified to give information. It was certainly requisite, in forming any new system of government, to obtain the most per-



fect acquaintance with all the particulars of the situation of those who were to be governed, as well as to pay the utmost attention to their opinions with regard to the nature of the regulations which ought to be adopted. It might appear proper to consult those who were to be governed beforehand, as it was certainly desirable that every government should meet the wishes of its subjects. It was politic, as the people were most sensible of their own wants, they might be supposed to be acquainted with the causes from which they rose, and qualified to point out the means of remedying them. By some strange neglect, however, the right hon. gentleman had not communicated on the subject with those very people from whom he was most likely to have received information and advice.

*The re-commitment was adjourned to the 6th May.*

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MAY 18.

WAYS AND MEANS.

*Mr. Pitt having stated the articles of expenditure and of ways and means of the year,*

MR. SHERIDAN objected, on general grounds, to the right hon. gentleman's (Mr. Pitt) statement, but he admitted that the day was at last arrived when he could agree with the right hon. gentleman, that the report of the committee of finance was as fair a report as could be expected. There were, Mr. Sheridan said, certain omissions on both sides of the account, which would not have happened had he had the honour of being a member of the committee, and to which he objected; but, as he meant to name the first vacant day for discussing it, it was not his intention to go into it then; he would barely remark that the report coincided with every word he had ever troubled the house with on the subject. The committee had stated their report with great candour and great accuracy, and the result, Mr. Sheridan said, was, that it was evident his Majesty's ministers had, since the year 1786, gone on with such increasing prodigality, that the new report, so far from confirming what the report of the committee of 1786 gave the house to expect, viz., that they would be that day voting the permanent peace establishment as they stated it, stated, that in 1794 they were actually called on to vote half a million more, which, with the increase of the casual expenses, made a difference of £1,300,000 more than they were given to imagine would

be the expenditure of the present year. Mr. Sheridan said, he did admit that there had been an increase of income within the last year, but gentlemen must not go away with the idea that the expenditure had not greatly exceeded what the revenue committee of 1786 taught them to expect would be the expenditure of the present year. Before, therefore, they adopted the report of the new committee, the alarming circumstance that he had mentioned ought to be explained to the country. Mr. Sheridan, in the course of his speech, referred to Mr. Steele's argument on a former day, and supported his assertion by stating the particulars on which he rested it, viz., that there was a permanent increase of £500,000 on the total amount of the expenses of the army, navy, ordnance, and miscellaneous services; and £800,000 arising from incidental and casual expenses. He said that we had paid off annuities of £200,000 a year, and added a permanent increase of £500,000 a year to the national expenditure.

*Mr. Pitt expressed his satisfaction at the hon. gentleman's declaration that he would name a separate day for the discussion of the subject; because, if the hon. gentleman, or any other, entertained doubts upon the report of the committee, or on any part of what he had stated that day, it certainly would be better to discuss those doubts on some particular day, than in a conversation when another and a different topic was under consideration. With regard to the allusion to what had been said by his hon. friend (Mr. Steele) on a former day, he was very confident his hon. friend never did state the permanent revenue as likely to be that which the hon. gentleman had just imputed to his hon. friend; but the amount of his hon. friend's argument had been that in case the expenditure should, from accidental circumstances, increase, the income of the country would proportionably increase, so that the public receipt would at all times cover the public expenditure. Mr. Pitt proceeded to observe that there was no part of the subject which was not familiar to the house, and which had not been debated again and again in every session since the year 1786. He declared himself happy, however, that the hon. gentleman agreed with him in giving due praise to the candour, the fairness, and the accuracy of the committee of finance, as exemplified in their report. As to the amount of the expenditure, the hon. gentleman, he observed, had stated that there was an increase of permanent establishment of £500,000; in answer to which, he must declare that much of that increase was not to be considered as expenses which would be permanent, but as charges that were accidentally incurred. These charges Mr. Pitt stated, and particularly mentioned £201,000 for necessities in our dockyards, which would of course operate as a saving in future. In answer to the extraordinary manner in which the hon. gentleman had commented on other parts of the subject, so as to make up his alleged increase of £1,300,000, he must, he said be indulged with a few words. He then went into a detail of the whole expenditure; and concluded with observing, that Mr. Sheridan included in his excess the deficiencies of the land and malt, and the sum destined for the American loyalists.*



Mr. Sheridan begged leave to say a few words in reply, and he declared they should be a very few words. Referring to the report of the committee of revenue of 1786, he showed that the report of the committee of 1791, in the statement of the expenditure, directly contradicted what the report of the committee of 1786 taught them to look forward to as the probable peace establishment in the year 1791. Another word, he said, he must utter, with regard to the challenge given by the hon. friend (Mr. Steele) of the right hon. gentleman. The latter denied his right hon. friend had given any such challenge or pledge, as he had expressly stated when the subject was last the ground of debate, and seemed to treat it as a ridiculous thing that his hon. friend, or any of his hon. friends could have attempted to justify the report of 1786. Mr. Sheridan observed that the chancellor of the exchequer had himself admitted an excess of £380,000 in three articles only, exclusive of the miscellaneous articles; and, therefore, he contended he had a right to say that there was a half million increase on the permanent establishment. It was, he declared, a point on which he should particularly insist, and it ought not to be slurred over; but the country should know precisely how the case stood. They had, he said, brought up annuities of £200,000, and incurred a permanent debt of £3,000,000. The fact was, the subject had been delusively stated, and glossed over, in order to appear well in the eyes of the public,—and so he had ever contended; but it had never been admitted at all, that any part of what he disputed was found before that day; whereas, from what the right hon. gentleman had himself said that day, it was evident to the committee he had been correct in all he had advanced. Mr. Sheridan, before he concluded, went into particulars to prove his assertions, and desired the committee to attend to the whole of them in forming their opinion on the subject.

*Mr. Pitt, in reply, again detailed the principal articles of the expenditure, in order to prove that the hon. gentleman was completely mistaken.*

Mr. Sheridan got up once more to answer several parts of Mr. Pitt's last argument. He admitted that a great cause of the increase was to be imputed to unforeseen circumstances; such as the provision for the younger part of the royal family, which he declared he highly approved; but he contended that every year would bring with it its amount of casual and incidental expenses,

which ought to be allowed for, and therefore it was incumbent on them to inform the country of the real truth, and not delude the people by telling them that this year there would be such a surplus, and next year a greater, when the chance was entirely the other way. Mr. Sheridan mentioned the finishing of Carlton House, which would occasion another increase, and to which the house was committed, having promised to provide for it—the prince having no interest to provide for it, &c., and therefore it must soon come under consideration. He also adverted to the debt from Holland, and said, if the payments by instalments were applied to the expenditure instead of extinguishing the public debt, the whole of that loan must be added to the amount of the national expenditure.

*Mr. Pitt's resolutions were put and agreed to; and the house being resumed, the report was ordered to be brought up on the next day.*

MAY 23.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF FINANCE.

MR. SHERIDAN rose to give notice that he meant, to-morrow se'nnight, to bring forward some resolutions on the report of the committee of finance. He informed the house that the manner in which he proposed to do this, would be by moving for the house to resolve itself into a committee of the whole house, to which he hoped the right hon. gentleman would have no objection, when he intended to move some resolutions of facts; the ground of which, he had no doubt, he should be able to make out to the satisfaction of the house. Mr. Sheridan lamented that he could not name an earlier day for the business, but it was on account of other gentlemen who wished to be present, and could not be in town sooner, that he was obliged to take so distant a day.

*Mr. Pitt said he could have no objection to such a discussion being brought forward; but he hoped a day would be named in the present week.*

*Mr. Bastard rose and moved, "That a committee be appointed to compare the reports of the committees in 1786 and 1791, to inquire into the income and expenditure, and to report their observations upon the same to the house."*

Mr. Sheridan said he certainly should second the hon. gentleman's motion. He declared he thought it was extremely proper that both the reports of 1786 and 1791 should be referred to a third committee, because it was undoubtedly true that there were a great many contradictions in both reports, as stated by the hon.





gentleman; and for that reason they ought to be referred to a third committee, in order to ascertain which of them was true. He despaired, Mr. Sheridan said, of being able to effect this; and, therefore, should have satisfied himself with barely moving that the house resolve itself, on Tuesday next, into a committee of the whole house, to take into consideration the report of the finance committee of 1791; and after they should have resolved themselves into that committee, he should move certain resolutions of fact respecting the report. If the right hon. gentleman did not agree to the two reports being referred to another select committee, he hoped he would not object to the house going into a committee to take the last report into consideration.

*Mr. Bastard's motion was negatived without a division.*

Mr. Sheridan, in reply to Mr. Pitt, said, he certainly should be extremely glad to accommodate the right hon. gentleman, but it depended not on himself. With regard to the right hon. gentleman's remark on his manner of speaking, he really had wished to convince the right hon. gentleman, without any effort to appear so, that he was serious in wishing the two last reports of the finance committees to be referred to another committee. He was, he confessed, amazed to hear any complaint of delay from the other side of the house, and more especially to hear it come from the right hon. gentleman, as it must be recollected he had repeatedly censured the right hon. gentleman for his regular procrastination of important public business till the end of every session. He declared, he had expected that the last report of the finance committee would have been brought forward long ago; since, before the Christmas holidays, the right hon. gentleman had taunted him on the ground of his supposing that he would not bring the motion for the appointment of a committee of finance forward immediately after the Christmas recess; but so far from doing this, the right hon. gentleman had not brought it forward for three months afterwards, and the report of that committee had only been on the table about a week or eight days; and it was not, surely, Mr. Sheridan said, very much his fault, that he had not read the report before it was received and printed. With regard to the day of taking it into consideration, he was, on his part, extremely desirous to have it considered some day in the present week; but one gentleman, who was on the committee, was obliged to be out of town all this

week ; and he wished that gentleman to be present at the discussion, as he understood he was desirous of stating his opinion on the subject. Mr. Sheridan hoped therefore, that there would be no objection to Monday next ; and if that day was agreed to he would write to the hon. member in question, to request that he would attend. He concluded with observing, that Monday, for the reason he had stated, was the earliest day he could name.

*Mr. Pitt regretted the absence of the gentleman alluded to by the hon. member ; but when he was told that an hon. gentleman who had been on the committee was out of town, and wished to be present at the discussion, he could not resist the proposed postponement ; he could not, however, but lament the state of public business, as he was afraid all in which he took a part would be ended before Monday.*

*The speaker put the question on Mr. Sheridan's motion, " That the house resolve itself into a committee of the whole house on Monday next, to take into consideration the report of the finance committee." Ordered.*

MAY 27.

ROYAL BURGHS OF SCOTLAND.

MR. SHERIDAN rose and said, that he would undoubtedly have been much obliged to the right hon. gentleman for his intimation of the speedy prorogation of parliament, had it, in the application he was about to make, been necessary to enter into all the detail with which it was connected. But such detail would not only be unnecessary, but improper. Before he should proceed to state what he shortly had to say, Mr. Sheridan said, he should first endeavour to refute some insinuations that the business had not been taken up, by those engaged in it, with all the seriousness and attention to which it was entitled. Every suspicion of this kind he thought it necessary to banish from the mind of the house, when he meant to call their most earnest attention to a business which he deemed of the utmost importance. In 1787, the first application on this subject had been made to parliament. It had been stated that the reform demanded was really no object to those who were chiefly interested. But how did this appear, when out of sixty-six royal burghs, fifty-eight had petitioned for the reform ; and he had been able to present to the house a petition signed by ten thousand persons, almost all of whom were real burgesses. The first petition, however, sent to him in 1787, had arrived too late, as the period for presenting



private petitions was then passed. In 1788, the application had been renewed. The hon. gentleman who opposed him on the other side (Mr. Dundas), had assented that a bill should be brought in, if it was printed, and had formed with him a sort of compromise; as an effect of which he expected, from his usual consistency of character, he would now second the motion. Another hon. gentleman behind him (Mr. Anstruther), who had likewise opposed him in this business, whose opposition he could not but regret, and to whose influence, in every other respect, he wished well, except as an alderman of Pittenweem, had moved for all the charters and sets of the royal burghs, in order that they might be taken into consideration during the recess of parliament, with a view, no doubt, to the inquiry which should afterwards follow. Having moved for the materials which could only be useful, in order to institute an inquiry, it could not be expected that he should oppose its progress. It had then been stated too, as an argument for opposing it, that the reform, as demanded, would completely overturn the constitution of the burghs. In this particular they had obviated the objection by joining issue, and in this state the business stood at the end of the session 1788. In 1789, as all public and private business had been suspended, from an unfortunate circumstance which, at that time afforded regret to all good citizens, and which they must now wish might never return—not much progress could be expected to be made in discussing the reform of the royal burghs. The bill had been again printed, and read a second time. He moved for a committee, when the hon. gentleman had said they took a wrong course, and instead of moving for a committee in order to consider of a remedy, they ought first to move for a committee to examine into the facts by which the necessity of this remedy was to be proved. To this proposition they had assented. He moved for a variety of papers, which it was agreed should be laid upon the table—and here again the matter rested. In the next session, Mr. Sheridan said, nothing had been done. The papers moved for had not, some of them, arrived till the middle of May, and not till he had found himself obliged to renew the order. No part of the delay, he hoped, could be imputable to him—the delay, this session, he would take upon himself. He had, indeed, advised it not to be brought forward at all; this advice he had given in compliance

with the opinion of his friends—that in the present state of the public mind, as differently acted upon by the revolution of a neighbouring country, it would be prudent for awhile to suppress all ideas of a reform at home. In this opinion, however, Mr. Sheridan owned he could not agree : for if either a spirit of servility had got abroad among some, or wild enthusiastic notions of liberty were cherished among others, he deemed it equally incumbent upon parliament, uninfluenced by extrinsic circumstances, to show their determined resolution to redress every grievance that demanded their interference, and attend alone to the calls of justice. He was likewise unwilling, he said, to bring forward a business of so much importance without that support which he most respected and esteemed. Looking to his object, he certainly considered it as no ground of censure to accommodate himself to means, whilst he made no sacrifice of principles. His objections, however, he had yielded to the wishes of those who were most interested, and he had the satisfaction to say, that he was supported in his attempt by names which, if he were to mention, would not be deemed likely to countenance any act of rashness. He would first wish to remove every idea that in the present business there was any novelty attempted.

The hon. gentleman, who might be supposed well acquainted with the history of his own country, ancient and modern, would know that the internal government of the royal burghs had always been an object of complaint and redress. He would read a commission so far back as the reign of Charles II. which enumerated the same grievances which were now actually stated to exist; and, among others, the misapplication of the public money to the purposes of corrupt influence, an evil which was then a subject of complaint, and of which the hon. gentleman was to consider whether there now remained any traces. No new grievance was now the subject of complaint. Power had always been growing into abuse. The same evils had always existed. No remedy was granted; nor was it likely, that in the reign which he had mentioned, any provision should be made for securing the liberties of the subject. So had the matter rested till 1784, when, encouraged by the declaration of a right hon. gentleman that he would always support parliamentary reform as a man and as a minister, the friends of reform in Scotland had formed a convention, and sent delegates



from the fifty-eight burghs who had different meetings on the subject. In this state the business had fallen into his hands. Little more, he conceived, was necessary to be said. When fifty-eight out of sixty-six burghs have stated great and positive grievances under which they laboured, and when they had professed gratitude to a right hon. gentleman for the encouragement which he had afforded them to expect redress, he trusted that their gratitude would be confirmed upon solid grounds. If, after all the information had been procured, Mr. Sheridan said, they should refuse to look into such information by a committee, they would certainly, by thus shrinking from the inquiry, grant that evils existed which they had neither fortitude to examine nor virtue to redress. If what was stated as grievance was fact, he demanded redress not as a matter of favour, but of right; as a claim which was not to be weighed by discretion, but which was established by justice. He should now shortly state the grievances which were complained of: first, the magistrates exacted, without legal authority, the cess or land tax. He was not to be told that the sum thus exacted above the legal proportion was small; however small it was, the exaction was no less a violation of justice than an object of redress. Secondly, the magistrates assume a power of disposing of the public money, according to their own discretion. Thirdly, they were self-elected, contrary to the law, as might be proved from the charters on the table. But what was the most serious grievance of all, there was no competent court of jurisdiction for the redress of grievances. In support of this assertion, Mr. Sheridan quoted the proceedings of the court of session, where, while the grievances had been allowed to exist, the court had been declared incompetent for redress. Nor did this competency, which was wanting in the court of session, reside either in the court of exchequer or in the convention of the royal burghs; so that here was an evil existing where there were absolutely no means of redress. He begged, however, to state, that he did not mean to include all the magistrates in the charge which he had brought forward of abuse; far less would he impute to his opponents any unworthy motives, as he trusted they would do justice to those motives of regard for the constitution, from which alone he had undertaken the present question. Whilst he gave credit to the inhabitants of Scotland for those advantages which they derived from a spirit of enterprise and industry, he wished likewise to secure them the full

protection of law and the benefits of an equal and fair administration of justice. Mr. Sheridan then moved, "that the several petitions, accounts and papers presented in the last session of the last parliament, relative to the internal government of the royal burghs of Scotland, should be referred to a committee." He said he did not know that parliament would be soon prorogued; it was an event entirely unexpected; nor did he see at present any reason for the strange scrambling expedition which had lately been used with regard to the public business. Much progress, however, might still be made; and if parliament was not prorogued till Mr. Hastings should bring forward his defence, all that was wished might be attained. If, however, he should not now succeed in making that progress in the business which he wished, he should hope that he would at least be allowed to take it up at an early period of the next session.

*Mr. Fox seconded the motion; but subsequently moved, as an amendment, that the words "early in the next session," should stand as part of the motion.*

Mr. Sheridan agreed to the amendment, but thought it necessary to make some reply to several things which had been said in the course of the debate. He could not help saying that he thought his hon. and learned friend (Mr. Anstruther) had treated him rather harshly in ascribing to him motives for delay, which he begged leave entirely to disclaim. The hon. and learned gentleman had said that the first part of his speech had been an apology for these delays; now, he neither had made, nor meant to make any apology on that point, although he thought it necessary, and no more than his duty, and his wish, to explain to the house the different causes that had occasioned those delays, which it was not necessary for him to recapitulate a second time. He could not avoid, Mr. Sheridan said, taking notice of what the hon. and learned gentleman had said, about his stating, in his former speech, his belief that he would have the support of the right hon. gentleman opposite to him, because that right hon. gentleman had been anxious for a parliamentary reform, and that he had wished, as it were, to keep the right hon. gentleman to a bargain on that point. In answer to this he would say, that the hon. and learned gentleman seemed not only to recollect for himself what had formerly been done in this business, but to recollect for the hon. gentleman opposite to him likewise. And, Mr. Sheridan contended, that those who wished for a parliamentary reform must,



agreeably to consistency, be friends to the present proposition which he had the honour to bring forward this night. He said, he must here disavow the charge that was brought against him by the right hon. gentleman, of having, at this time, taken the house by surprise, by the notice which he had given of his motion a few days ago. On this point he had already given, he trusted, sufficient reason for the delays in former years, and likewise why he was so long in bringing it on this session; but certainly nobody could think from that that he had abandoned the subject entirely; if they did, they were very much mistaken; and he begged to recall to the right hon. gentleman's recollection that it was upon his suggestion that he had dispensed with the second reading of the bill last year, in order that there might be time and opportunity given to state the specific grievances and propose a suitable remedy, because it certainly was proper that inquiry should precede reform.

Now the right hon. gentleman must allow that the inquiry had been made; he trusted, therefore, that he could not refuse granting the remedy applied for. Mr. Sheridan said he agreed perfectly with the right hon. gentleman that a decision was necessary, and he was anxious that it might be had as speedily as possible. He contended that the application of these burghs was certainly so far connected with parliamentary reform, inasmuch as they complained of the self-election of the magistrates. In this and other grievances, however, his hon. and learned friend contended that they had no right to complain, because all the English burghs were in the same situation; but this he denied, because, whatever was the charter of English burghs, or the cess of Scotch burghs, the English could not act against the spirit and essence of their charters, but the Scotch had done so very often. After what had been said at different times in that house, it would be needless for him to detain the house with a minute detail of all the grievances which were complained of; and he hoped, if it were, as the hon. and learned gentleman had stated, that the English burghs were in the same situation, it would not be admitted as a just argument that abuse ought to continue in any other place because it existed in London. In his opinion there ought to be no power of abuse without a power of remedy, which seemed to be the present state of the royal burghs of Scotland. Mr. Sheridan then remarked upon the arbitrary power and conduct of the

convention of burghs which sit annually at Edinburgh. Upon an application and complaint made to them by respectable inhabitants of a burgh, to inquire into some conduct of their magistrates, which was thought to be improper and against the interests of the burgh, this convention took the matter into their consideration, and stated, that to promote the harmony, good will, and tranquillity, as well as the peace and good order of the burgh, they had given what they called the following *decreet arbitral*; which was a sentence, "That the burgesses, deacons, &c., have no right to hold meetings, to confer, or treat upon subjects of this sort." By treating, it was not meant entertaining, as canvassing at an election, but merely arguing upon matters respecting the burghs; and in this manner they discharged and forbade all such complaints, and declared the rights of the burgesses in that part of the kingdom on matters in which no one could deny that their interests were materially concerned. Such, Mr. Sheridan said, they found to be the liberal free cess of one burgh, agreeably to their present constitution or rather according to the interpretation which the convention gave to that constitution. Another cess which some boroughs enjoyed, no doubt, for the same purpose of promoting harmony, peace, and good order amongst the inhabitants, was of a nature that prevented certain degrees of consanguinity, such as fathers and sons, brothers, and so on, from holding offices in the magistracy; a circumstance the wisdom and propriety of which he did not mean to enter upon at this time.

*Mr. Sheridan's original motion was then put and negatived; after which he adopted Mr. Fox's amendment, and moved,*

*"That the house will, early in the next session of parliament, take into consideration the matter of the petitions and other papers presented to the house in the last parliament, relating to the internal government of the royal burghs of Scotland."*

*Mr. Erskine seconded Mr. Sheridan's motion, which was agreed to nem. con.*

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MAY 30.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF FINANCE OF 1786.

MR. SHERIDAN rose, and moved that the notice which stood as the order of the day, for him to move for a committee to take into consideration the report of the committee of finance of 1786, and the report of the committee of 1791, might be read. The same having been read, Mr. Sheridan stated, that there were cer-



tain papers to be presented that day which it might be material for him to refer to, and therefore he thought it right to move to have the order discharged and entered for the next day. He said, he hoped he should have no occasion to refer to the papers in question, but as it was impossible for him to say beforehand whether he should or not, he would move for the discharge of the order. It was discharged accordingly, and entered for this day.

*Mr. Pitt, who happened not to be in the house at the time the foregoing motion was made, but came in just after, said he understood the hon. gentleman opposite to him had moved to put off the consideration of the two reports from the committees of finance till the next day. He hoped, however, the discussion would really be brought on this day; and, as the hon. gentleman had called the attention of the house to the subject, he gave him notice that if he moved any propositions, he should either object to them or move amendments on them; or, perhaps, move such other propositions as would bring the whole state of the subject fairly and fully before the public.*

Mr. Sheridan, in reply, said, it appeared to him to be rather premature in the right hon. gentleman to talk of objecting to his propositions, or of moving amendments, before he knew what those propositions would be. He did assure the right hon. gentleman, that he would endeavour to make it as difficult as possible to the right hon. gentleman either to object, or move amendments upon his propositions, which would be resolutions of fact, founded upon figures, to which it would be almost impossible for the right hon. gentleman to object.

*When the papers were afterwards presented, Mr. Sheridan moved to have them printed.*

*A short conversation then took place between the chancellor of the exchequer and Mr. Sheridan, on the ground of its being impossible to have all the papers printed in time for the next day. In the course of the conversation it came out that a material point in the discussion would be the consideration of the disposal of the money voted for the finishing of Carlton House, and that Mr. Pitt had yesterday morning received a letter on the subject, officially from Lord Southampton, which Mr. Sheridan wished to have laid before the house. Mr. Pitt said he really had not had sufficient leisure to consider what was proper to be done with it, or what answer to send, but the hon. gentleman need not be afraid of his wishing to conceal it; since, if he could have any such desire, it was not in his power to carry it into effect, as the person who sent it might furnish a copy.*

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JUNE 2.

## SUMS VOTED FOR CARLTON HOUSE.

MR. SHERIDAN rose and observed, that the return made to his motion for papers relative to Carlton House was so far defec-

tive, that a paper which he considered as of very considerable importance, had been wholly omitted. This omission he by no means ascribed to design, but merely to accident. To explain the nature of this paper he read a resolution moved some years ago by the right hon. gentleman over against him (Mr. Pitt), and agreed to by the house, namely, "That an address be presented to his Majesty, that he would be graciously pleased to issue from his civil list the sum of £20,000 towards completing the works at Carlton House, as soon as estimates of the whole of the expense for completing the same should have been laid before the lords commissioners of the treasury." From this resolution it appeared, that the money ought not to have been issued until estimates of the whole expense should have been previously procured by the treasury: but the lords of the treasury had, in point of fact, issued the money, without having previously taken care to have estimates made out by the board of works. That it was by the king's, and not by the prince's servants, that the estimates ought to have been made out, appeared from this, that Carlton House belonged not to the Prince of Wales but to his Majesty; and, consequently, the money having been voted for repairing a house, which in reality belongs to the king and not to the Prince of Wales, it was by the king's surveyors, and not by those of the prince, that the estimate ought to have been made: the person, therefore, to whom the money was issued, ought to be considered as a public accountant, and bound to render to parliament an account of the expenditure. In this light Mr. Holland ought to be called to give an account of the expenditure of the several sums which had been voted for Carlton House.

This, Mr. Sheridan said, he thought it necessary to say, as a report, as strange as it was false, had got abroad, that the money voted for completing Carlton House had been taken out of the hands of those whose duty it was to apply it to the purpose for which it had been voted, and that it was applied to purposes of a very different nature. The unfinished state of Carlton House might induce people to believe this, who did not know that his royal highness, not considering the money as his, but as voted for the repair of his father's house, had made it a point never to touch a shilling of it. Mr. Sheridan then observed, that in a letter from Colonel Hulse, in the printed accounts, it was stated that several papers were inclosed to Mr. Pitt, one of which, marked No. 5,



contained Mr. Holland's estimate of the works, and an account of the money expended upon them. Now it so happened, that this paper, marked No. 5, had not been laid before the house; he moved therefore that it be laid before the house.

*Mr. Pitt said that an estimate had been delivered to him for his Majesty's perusal, stating the amount of the sum necessary for completing and furnishing Carlton House; in which so few alterations were made by the king's surveyors, that he thought it best to pay the whole sum; and it was accordingly paid into the hands of the prince's treasurer. As to the paper for which the hon. member had moved, he believed it was actually in the printed accounts, though it was by mistake marked No. 6, instead of No. 5; for Colonel Hulse's letter mentioned no more than five inclosures; this No. 6 was therefore the precise paper which ought to have been marked No. 5.*

Mr. Sheridan said, the right hon. gentleman was mistaken, for if he would read Colonel Hulse's letter again, he would find that it mentioned things as contained in No. 5, of which nothing appeared in No. 6. He still insisted, that the minister, in obedience to the resolution of the house, ought to have ordered the king's surveyors to make out an estimate for work to be done at a house which belonged to the king, and not to the prince.

*Mr. Sheridan's motion passed without a division. He afterwards wished to know if Mr. Pitt had any objection to a motion for a copy of a letter written to him (Mr. Pitt) by Lord Southampton on this business. Mr. Pitt having in reply stated the letter to be private, Mr. Sheridan gave up his intended motion.*

*Mr. Grey moved for an address, imploring his Majesty not to prorogue the parliament without communicating some distinct information relative to the cause of the present armament.*

*Mr. Grey moved that an humble address be presented to his Majesty, to express the deep concern his faithful commons felt at being called upon for a promise to make good the expense of new preparations for war, after having been so recently obliged to impose on their constituents additional taxes on account of the late armament against Spain.*

*"Humbly to represent to his Majesty that in the answer which they gave to his Majesty's most gracious message, his faithful commons, acted on by a firm reliance that his Majesty's paternal care and regard for the welfare of his people would not suffer him, by a causeless interference in the disputes of other countries, to endanger the peace and tranquillity of this.*

*"That no inquiry was made into the particular circumstances which had induced his Majesty to arm, and a promise of support was given as indefinite as the object for which it was demanded.*

*"That since that period two months have elapsed. The preparations for war are still continued. The expense for which his Majesty's faithful commons must hereafter provide is daily increasing. No information as to its cause or object has yet been given; and if parliament should now be prorogued, his Majesty's*

*faithful commons will be placed in the disagreeable, and hitherto unprecedented, situation of returning to their constituents, after having subjected them, by a vote of this house, to new burdens, the extent of which they cannot limit, and the justice or necessity of which they cannot explain.*

*"For these reasons, and others, which the circumstances of the times may suggest, his Majesty's faithful commons humbly implore his Majesty not to prorogue the parliament till his Majesty shall have it in his power to communicate to them some distinct information relative to the cause of the present armament: in order, that if actual hostilities should take place, and it should be necessary for his Majesty to incur any further expense, his faithful commons may have an opportunity of exercising their hitherto undisputed privilege, and discharging their most important duty, in considering the extent and propriety of the same, as well as of assisting his Majesty, by their advice, to form a just judgment both as to the expediency of past measures and the policy of future councils; and they humbly beg leave to assure his Majesty that they will cheerfully forego the private benefits and comforts of an early recess to fulfil a duty highly necessary to the public satisfaction, and of the utmost importance to the policy, if not to the salvation of the state."*

*Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan both rose to second the motion.*

Mr. Sheridan, in support of the motion said, that much as the right hon. gentleman was entitled generally to the praise of ability, he certainly had not on that occasion advanced any argument which could make it necessary for him, or any gentleman, to rise, especially after the clear and explicit answer of his right hon. friend. There was nothing to reply to; nothing to refute; a convincing proof that the motion which had been made so ably, and in support of which his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox) had wielded his Herculean club, was unanswerable. All the puny efforts of the other side to resist the blows of that club, served only to expose them more to the eyes of the house in the unequal conflict—they were exhausted in argument. But his right hon. friend was not exhausted. His rich and fruitful imagination had produced the new and irresistible arguments which had given conviction to every thinking mind. But the opposite side of the house, Mr. Sheridan said, were not only tired but exhausted. They were tired of being compelled to sit and hear accusations which, whatever might be the result, they could not refute; tired of enduring the scourge, and of being obliged at the same time to kiss the rod; tired of their own supporters, whose clumsy defences served not only to aggravate their suffering, but to disgust their taste; and thus, exhausted and spiritless, they sat in dejected silence, and left the field to their con-



quering enemy. Ever till now, he said, the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had at least made the show of ingenuousness ; he had always said something in vindication of the measures he had taken, or in support of the confidence which he claimed ; but now he looked round with a supplicating eye, and pressed allies into the service, from whose aid, however, he did not profit, and whose excuses even he was forced to deprecate. Such was the situation in which the opposite side stood, and with such complete triumph were the arguments of his hon. friends to go forth into the country.

He could not, however, say, that there had been nothing new advanced on the opposite side. The right hon. gentleman had imparted two pieces of important information ; the one good, and the other bad. The bad point was, "that it was utterly impossible for him to say when the armed negotiation might be concluded, the answer might come in a week, but it might be a fortnight, a month, two months, or three months." Thus the house was told that there was no reason to believe, that though Britain had armed to give vigour, dignity, and effect to the negotiation of the cabinet, they had no knowledge, or even conjecture, of the time when it could be effectual. This was bad news, as it proved that firmness and decision, which ought to be the natural companions of an armament, were wanting ; and, that though they had put the nation to all the expense, and had committed its character in the eye of Europe, they had not sent a message which must draw from the court of Russia a speedy and unequivocal answer. The point of information which he considered as good news, was a discovery which the right hon. gentleman had made, that in case of the apprehension of an invasion, his Majesty might convene the parliament in fourteen days. He had not been extremely accurate on the point ; but it was his opinion, that if, when we had sent our fleet to the Baltic it should be discovered that there was an intention in the empress to invade this country, the king might exercise his undoubted prerogative and convene the parliament in fourteen days. This opinion was important ; for, as the right hon. gentleman was going into the cabinet, it was of consequence to the house to know, that they would have the recommendation of the right hon. gentleman for this exercise of the power which was vested in the crown.

No man, Mr. Sheridan said, was disposed to deny the two

prerogatives, of making peace and war, and of proroguing parliament ; but he would make this unqualified declaration, that the prerogative of making peace and war was not to be exercised without consulting the two houses of parliament, when they could be consulted. The prerogative certainly ought not to be exercised without such consultation ; and he would add, that it could not, without material detriment to the crown, and without endangering the best interest of the country. The two houses were the best and soundest advisers of the king ;—for though he possessed the advantage of a privy council (the selection of of the privy council, called the cabinet, was unknown to the constitution), the true and legitimate advisers which the crown was bound to refer to, was the commons' and lords' houses of parliament. It might happen undoubtedly, that the crown might be obliged, from external circumstances, to declare war at the time he could not consult the two houses of parliament. It was true, and it was a defect in the constitution. It was a calamity, Mr. Sheridan said, to which the nation might be occasionally subject. But would they covet that situation by choice which was a necessity and a fault ? Would they voluntarily put themselves into a situation in which they could not derive the fair benefits of the constitution which was our boast ? Mr. Sheridan desired, that they should not be called on to make this sacrifice of their duty ; he desired, that that which was their right, as truly as the prerogative of declaring war was the right of the king, namely, the right of advising the crown, might not be surrendered by their own supineness, nor suffered to be taken from them by the act of ministers. The address to the crown, which they had voted, saying generally that they would make good the expenses of the armament was, in truth, an unlimited vote of credit ; and this, he averred, was an act which the commons' house of parliament had no right to do, consistently with the compact which subsisted between them and their constituents. The king, he said, must not dare to violate his compact with the people ; and in like manner the compact between that house and the people of England was equally binding ; and by granting an unlimited vote of credit, they had done that which they had no right to do. If they should be told that they ought not to require previous information, as the purse was still left to them, Mr. Sheridan said, he denied it. They had surrendered the purse-



strings ; they were to be separated and sent adrift ; and the key of the strong box of England was left in the hands of the right hon. gentleman. He was to draw on the public for what sums he pleased ; nay, and without even pledging himself that at any future time he would explain to the country what was the true meaning of his pursuit. What he had said on a former day, in the way of promise, did not amount to what a learned gentleman (Sir Elijah Impey) had said ; and it was more explicit than what the right hon. gentleman himself had recollected. Something between the two, Mr Sheridan said, struck his memory, as being the assertion. It was evident that the promise which he had made on the affair of the Spanish armament, and which he had broken, had taught him prudence ; and he was now cautious how he promised to give them any satisfaction at any time. On the Spanish armament, he had directly promised them to explain the whole of the negotiation ;—but on its close, not one explanation had been given :—if he had kept his word, he would have convinced every gentleman of the impolicy, injustice, and folly of the whole measure. Mr. Sheridan concluded with observing, that the experience of that armament ought to make them cautious on this ; and he thought that they ought to come to a resolution, declaring that the house should receive from ministers, at a future time, a full and explicit disclosure of all the circumstances of this armed negotiation ; that they might be able to judge of the policy and wisdom of the measure on which, without explanation, ministers had demanded the confidence and the money of the people of England.

*The house divided on the question ; ayes 75 ; noes 170.*

JUNE 3.

REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO EXAMINE  
THE SEVERAL PAPERS RELATING TO THE PUBLIC INCOME  
AND EXPENDITURE.

MR. SHERIDAN rose, and said, he rejoiced that they were now in a form to examine with accuracy, whether his assertions and predictions on the state of the finances, or those of the chancellor of the exchequer, had been verified by facts and events. The committee need not be alarmed at the number of the resolutions which he meant to move (forty) although they were, he believed,

one for every member present ; because, being founded on the reports of the revenue committees of 1786 and 1791, it required but little argument to support them. It was unnecessary, he said, for him to press on the attention of the committee, that no subject could be more important, than whether or not parliament was doing its duty to the public on the state of the finances,—was exhibiting a true account of their actual situation, and watching over every circumstance in the receipt and expenditure of the money levied on the people, with the attention that their duty to their constituents required.

Experience showed, that all the circumstances of domestic economy in which nations were formerly interested, the patriotism of their rulers, and the characters of this or that great man, were becoming daily of less importance, excepting the management of public money, and the mode of taking it from the people. When he considered this, he said, he could not but be surprised at the conduct of the house of commons on a subject to which he thought they could not be too attentive. Instead of attention, he had observed, for many years, a remissness which was far from creditable. From the examination of public accounts they seemed to shrink, as from a task which was either above their comprehension, or not within their province. Revenue regulations and tax bills they appeared to consider as things which they were to vote on confidence in the minister ; notwithstanding the multitude of provisions which they generally contained, by almost every one of which the liberty of the subject was more or less affected. In consequence of this confidential carelessness, Mr. Sheridan said, he had never been able to get a tax bill printed, though he had often attempted it—an attempt in which he was persuaded he must at length succeed ; for it was not to be believed that the house would persevere in passing bills, containing a great variety of important and complicated clauses, without taking the ordinary means to comprehend and understand them.

It was not a little extraordinary, he said, that when they had appointed a select committee to examine and revise the report of the committee of 1786 on the state of the public revenue and expense, when the committee of 1791 had made an estimate of the probable expense of the future peace establishment, exceeding the



estimate of the committee of 1786 by half a million, that the house had received that estimate without asking a single question respecting the cause of increase; and had voted supplies for the peace establishment of the current year, independently of the argument exceeding the increased estimate by £800,000 without a single reason assigned why the peace establishment of 1791 should be greater than that of future years was expected to be. It was equally extraordinary that the committee of 1791 told the house that the revenue had risen half a million above the estimate of 1786, and that the permanent expense had risen above the estimate in the same proportion; so that all the produce of new taxes, of arbitrary and oppressive regulations, of the unjustifiable extension of the excise laws since 1786, had gone to the support of new establishments, and not to the reduction of the public debt. It was not the duty of the select committee to inquire into the increase of the establishments. They had, however, made an estimate of it in their report, and such was the result of it, that the house had received it without the least surprise. Were an historian to give an account of the affairs of Europe since 1786, in his chapter of finance, after detailing the situation of other states, he might naturally say, "When we look to Great Britain, after the inquiry that she had instituted, and the principles of economy that she had laid down, we must suppose that she was availing herself of the quiet of her only formidable rival; and that the security which she consequently enjoyed was employed in reducing her establishments, and applying her increased revenue to conquer the only enemy she had to dread—her national debt." Instead of this, we had been increasing all the means of defence in proportion as our security increased; and our ministers had thought it their duty to look out for new enemies when France ceased to be the object of our dread. Mr. Sheridan said, he had heard the extraordinary increase of the revenue exultingly stated by an hon. gentleman (Mr. Steele) before Christmas; in opposition to which, Mr. Sheridan said, he had then asserted, that the average receipt, since 1786, did not amount to the estimate of 1786, and the report of the committee now proved the assertion. In that average he could not include the receipt of the last year, because he had not the accounts of it before him. But he admitted that it had been great, and he should, by and by, explain from what circumstances.

The committee of 1786 found the annual amount					
of permanent taxes at	-	-	-	-	£12,042,697
They had estimated it at	-	-	-	-	12,797,471
It produced in 1786	-	-	-	-	11,836,531
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Falling short of the estimate	-	-	-	-	£960,940

The chancellor of the exchequer, continued Mr. Sheridan, whose business it was to raise public credit as he could, that he might lose as little as possible of his own, resolved to get rid of this deficiency, and to screw up the annual receipt by every possible means. It was highly proper to do this; but it ought to have been done openly, on a fair statement of the cause, instead of being done by what was called regulation of taxes, which were in many cases new taxes, and other indirect methods.

It was a false principle that the true state of the finances was not to be told to the public. Being once fairly and honestly stated, and open and avowed means provided to remove any deficiency, public credit would increase with public confidence. As one instance of indirect revenue, the assessed duties, on pretence of frauds and evasions, were transferred from the excise to the stamp office; and instead of the usual mode of presuming every man to be innocent till he was proved guilty, every man was presumed to be a defaulter who could not prove that he was not. Under the threat of a rigorous and expensive exchequer process, it was assumed that no man had paid at the excise office, and all were called upon to pay at the tax office. Those who had paid and had mislaid their receipts, or who did not like trouble, could not apply at the excise office, as they were told they might do, to have the payment made there returned, and by this mode a considerable sum was obtained, but certainly in a very unfair way of taxation. Something similar to this happened when 10 per cent. was added to the assessed duties as part of the ways and means for the expenses of the Spanish armament. About three months after the collector came at Lady-day, and demanded 10 per cent., not for a quarter, but for a whole year. With just as much propriety, in point of principle, might he have demanded it for ten years. All these indirect modes of raising money did harm. Retrospective taxes deprived the consumer of the option which he ought to have, of using or not using the thing taxed; they insulted the feelings of men, and



taught them to consider taxes not as a fair and necessary contribution for the public benefit, but as a harsh and unexpected imposition.

The average of 1786 and 1787 was	-	£12,295,663
Less than the estimate by	-	501,808
The average of 1786, 87, 88, was	-	12,468,092
Less than the estimate by	-	329,376
The average of 1786, 87, 88, 89	-	12,653,537
Less than the estimate by	-	143,944

Thus all the accounts in which the great increase of the revenue had been blazoned forth for four years, had been circulated for the purpose of deluding the public, and obtaining an easy concurrence to the progressive increase of annual expenses.

The average of 1786, 87, 88, 89, 90	£12,879,308
Exceeding the estimate by	81,837

If the calculations, Mr. Sheridan said, were made on the amount of the permanent taxes, and the land and malt, the result would be still more unfavourable to the estimate of the committee of 1786. That committee, besides the taxes on which they calculated, pointed out various additional aids, so that the public had a right to expect a considerable surplus above their estimate. The chancellor of the exchequer had not been sparing of regulations; he had modified and amended tax bills with all the effect of new taxes, and extended the odious system of excise; and yet, with all these helps, the average produce of the revenue, since that estimate was made, gave only the inconsiderable excess above stated. Gentlemen must own that there never was a period more favourable to the increase of the revenue in all its branches, or than which a more favourable one could be expected. Now, in the produce of 1790, which alone had saved the credit of the committee of 1786, even in appearances, there were circumstances which contributed to swell the amount that could not be expected to be permanent. The produce of the fifty-third week, which came in only once in six years, was £193,000. By the additional duties on spirits, imposed before Christmas, about £100,000 had been brought into the account of that year, which was only an anticipation of the receipt of the next. The duties on spirits exceeded what they produced in 1786, by £500,000. There was also an extraordinary increase on tea, wood, and to-

bacco. It had always been admitted, that putting tobacco under the excise laws would increase the revenue for a short time; but it was denied that the increase would be permanent. It remained to be seen whether it would be so or not. The committee of 1791 said the increase of revenue might be relied on, because it was on articles of general consumption. The articles stated were so; but on many other articles of general consumption there appeared from the accounts to be a decrease. In the two last years £240,000 had been taken out of the hands of the receiver-general of the customs, which was considered as a floating balance not likely to be diminished; but whether diminished or not, it could not come in aid of future years.

On looking at these and other articles, Mr. Sheridan said, he did not think that the receipt of 1790 would be permanent. The select committee had very properly distrusted the receipt of that year, and founded their estimate on an average of three years. As he meant to follow their report as closely as he could, his resolutions were founded on that average. The expenditure since 1786 exceeded, on an average, the calculation of the committee by about one million. This excess had been defrayed by extraordinary aids, which were now first properly brought forward, and classed in the report of the select committee. They amounted to six millions; and by so much since 1786 had the annual expense exceeded the permanent annual income. From the account of extraordinary aids, the committee excluded the Dutch loan; now if the instalments by which it was repaid were paid into the hands of the commissioners for reducing the public debt, that exclusion would be proper; but, as they were added to the ways and means of the current year, the repayments would be spent, while the annuity on which the principal was raised, remained, and would be as much an addition to the public debt as any other whatever. He was not less surprised, he said, at another passage of the report. After stating the extraordinary aids, it added, "from the nature of the articles which have composed these extraordinary aids, it is evidently impossible to form any estimate of what farther receipt may be expected under such of those heads, as can recur in future." This seemed to imply that some of those aids might be expected to be efficient, or that something considerable might be still expected from the whole. He asserted that none of them could be efficient to any degree, ex-



cepting the lottery. The respited arrears from the India company, amounting to £522,500, being paid, could produce nothing for a future year. The arrears of land and malt, due before 1786, had gradually diminished to a very small sum, and were now exhausted. Of the impress monies and monies repaid, amounting to £820,165, £600,000 was received from the India Company for the expense of troops in India. This ought rather to be considered as a loan than an aid, because it was a claim which the company had always disputed. A right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) had, indeed, said, "let us get the money, and see how they will get it back;" but if there was not a certain management, he would not say collusion, between government and the company, there could be little doubt but that they would get it back on the fair construction of the act of parliament on which it was demanded. This appeared to swell the payments under that head, for the last two years, to a large amount; but if it were deducted, the produce of imprest monies and monies repaid, had fallen to nothing.

The repayments of the Dutch loan, Mr. Sheridan said, as he had already shown, must either be applied to the extinction of debt, or the sum lent, added to the increase of funded debt. The army savings, which had arisen from the issues of the war, were no longer productive; in short, not one of the heads of extraordinary aids could be looked to in future, excepting the lottery, if parliament should think fit to continue it; and he should never think the finances in a flourishing situation whilst so mischievous a source was resorted to. Such being the future prospect of the revenue, what was the state of the expenditure? The committee of 1786 estimated the navy at £1,800,000; the committee of 1791 estimated it at £2,000,000. What confidence could the public give to such estimates, when they saw such an increase, without any reason assigned for it, and when they saw a sum voted for the current year considerably exceeding the highest estimate? The committee of 1791 had not stated any time at which a peace establishment, according to their estimate, might be expected; and in forbearing to do this, they had been wiser than their predecessors. He wished that ministers would try a peace establishment, if it were out a year or two, by way of experiment, to see how the circumstances of the country could bear it. The estimate of the army in 1786, was £1,600,000; in 1791

it was £1,748,842. The ordnance, in 1786, was £348,000; in 1791 it was £375,000. The noble duke at the head of the ordnance stated such reasons for the increase as showed that new articles were always likely to arise, and that no estimate was to be depended on. The noble duke, who was a great economist, and had many qualities that fitted him for his department, if he were not so great an engineer, added reasons to his estimate, and then showed how little faith was due to it.

Mr. Sheridan said that he had now canvassed the heads on which the resolutions were founded, and he requested, that when the chancellor of the exchequer heard them moved, he would not negative or move the previous question upon them, unless he could show that they were false. He said this, because he had moved resolutions on the report of the committee of 1786, which, though as clear in point of fact, from the report, as that two and two make four, the right hon. gentleman had negatived on pretence that they contained facts indeed, but facts which it was not necessary to declare. It was hardly necessary, Mr. Sheridan said, to read the whole of them, because they were not a series of logical inductions, but independent facts, and he should move the first.

*Mr. Pitt wished to hear the whole, because the object of the committee was not merely to inquire whether the resolutions were true or false, but whether they were material to declaring the state of the finances, as it appeared in the report of the select committee.*

Mr. Sheridan then read his resolutions, with comments on each. The last, he said, was an inference from the whole which, if true, it was a duty they owed to their constituents to declare.

*Mr. Rose thought it would be best to move the resolutions and have them printed; which, though not strictly regular, might be done by a general concurrence.*

Mr. Sheridan expressed his assent to this method.

*Mr. Fox said he had no intention now to enter into debate, but something had fallen from the right hon. gentleman for which he was sorry. With some of the resolutions he had expressed his agreement, to others his dissent; but upon the general view he thought they needed not to be put to the question. Now he was of opinion that every one of the resolutions of his hon. friend ought to receive an aye or a nay. The public ought to be convinced whether these resolutions were supported merely by the authority of an individual or founded upon facts. Mr. Pitt had no objection to go into the detail; but this, he said, was a point which must depend upon the discussion that should afterwards take place. In the mean time, he did not think the authority of one individual sufficient to call the house to decide upon resolutions which were not, upon the general view, deemed of import-*



ance. Monday he thought might be a fit day for the discussion. Mr. Pitt then read several propositions, drawn up by himself and a few friends, who, he said, had taken great pains with the subject. As to extraordinary expenses and extraordinary resources, neither of these, Mr. Pitt said, he had taken into consideration. If, however, it should be thought necessary to bring them forward, they would form two other resolutions. He trusted now, that gentlemen, being in full possession of all the materials of discussion, would be enabled to come to a decided conclusion on the subject. Mr. Fox rose again and said the chief object was not, in his opinion, the result that the house would form, but which the public at large would form; for though they had not, in common with the members of that house, the advantage to be drawn from the power of reasoning upon figures, yet they could easily distinguish what were facts decided upon by the authority of the house of commons, and ground their opinion upon those facts. He repeated that it was his earnest wish to have on every proposition a distinct affirmative or a distinct negative. Mr. Pitt said that he had no objection to those facts which should lead to a conclusion.

Mr. Sheridan said, that his object was not merely to state facts and figures for the information of the house and the country, he wanted likewise something to be done; he wanted the house to disapprove of the extraordinary expense, that the minister might be called on for an explanation. If the expense of the establishments, he observed, should still increase with the revenue, a system would be established of the most lavish prodigality. The propositions of the right hon. gentleman, he said, were in general fair and explicit; with the first, however, he could not concur. The income of the five last years had not exceeded the estimate of the committee of 1786; for they had asserted, that if certain laws were enacted for the protection of the taxes, they would produce so much more. On that ground he would negative the first resolution. They had likewise said, that the extraordinary expenses would be defrayed by the extraordinary receipts; in this too they had failed, for a loan had become necessary.

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JUNE 6.

## REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF 1791.

MR. SHERIDAN expressed his satisfaction that the adjournment of the consideration of his resolutions had taken place, as it had given them time to consider them, and he was sure that the more they were considered the more they would be acquiesced in. He observed, that it would be the less necessary for him to trouble the house at any length, as he had gone into the subject on Friday last. He was, he said, sorry to declare that he must

differ from the resolutions which had been brought forward by the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt). Those resolutions were extremely short, and few in number; his own resolutions were much more numerous. The first statement of the right hon. gentleman over the way, was, "that the average produce during the last five years of the taxes imposed previous to the year 1786, had exceeded the amount expected by the committee appointed in the year 1789, to examine the public income and expenditure." That resolution, Mr. Sheridan said, he must contradict. The other resolution of the right hon. gentleman, he observed, merely stated, that all the expenditure of the last five years had been defrayed either by the ordinary income, by extraordinary income, or by certain sums that had been borrowed; which, no doubt, was exactly the method by which the expenditure in all parts of the world must be defrayed; in such information, therefore, there was nothing very important or very striking.

Mr. Sheridan, having read over in a summary way the seven resolutions brought forward by the chancellor of the exchequer, declared, that he conceived they did not contain any great intelligence. He said, he thought it his duty to go more at length into the subject; and he had endeavoured to show how diffident a committee should be, when they were endeavouring to prove what would be the probable amount of our future revenue and expenditure. The committee of 1786 on that subject, fell short by about £900,000; and he contended, that all the accounts which, year after year, had been laid before the public by the right hon. gentleman were absolutely fallacious, and that the predictions of the select committee had completely failed. He had thought it a part of his duty, Mr. Sheridan said, to show that the average of two, three, and four years had fallen considerably short of the sum estimated; and that the extraordinary resources of last year had been very great, and had enabled them to say, that on the average of the last five years, the income did exceed the expenditure by about £51,000. The right hon. gentleman had not only, he said, thought it sufficient to state that our expense had been defrayed by our income, but he had also thought it right and necessary to state what the enormous amount of those expenses had been, in the course of the last five years, and the resources also; and to direct the attention of the public to the unfortunate circumstance of its not being likely that our expenses



would diminish, when our extraordinary resources were nearly exhausted.

There was, Mr. Sheridan said, another singular circumstance highly worthy of observation, namely, that the finance committee of 1786, with a great degree of confidence, had laid down a peace establishment that was to have taken place at the end of the year 1790; the report of the committee of 1791 had added between 4 and £500,000 to that peace establishment, without alleging a single reason for so great an increase. He said, he had stated that fact merely to show what little reliance was to be had on the committee of 1786; and he believed that committee was just as likely to be right as the committee of 1791. Mr. Sheridan contended, that whilst an annuity to the amount of £111,020 had been redeemed by the commissioners on behalf of the public, in the form of debt re-purchased, an annuity of four times that amount was proposed to be entailed on the nation in the form of increased establishment. He wished, he said, to come to his last resolution, which, if the committee would grant him, he would willingly agree to waive all the rest. He thought he had a right to have that resolution granted him, simply on the ground of the difference between the report of the finance committee of 1786, and that of 1791, with regard to the amount of the peace establishment. Here Mr. Sheridan read his last resolution to the committee, which was, "that upon a due consideration of all these circumstances and accounts, this committee feel it to be their indispensable duty to declare, that the great increase proposed to the permanent peace establishment in the report of the select committee of 1791, ought not to be considered as receiving countenance or approbation from the house of commons until the causes of the same shall be fully explained, and the necessity of them made manifest." If the committee would but give him the last resolution (Mr. Sheridan repeated), he was ready to give up all the rest. He then concluded with moving his first resolution, *viz.* "that it appears that the select committee of 1786 proceeded upon a supposition that the annual and permanent taxes then subsisting, were likely to produce annually the sum of £15,397,471."

*The chairman having put the question on this resolution, Mr. Pitt moved an amendment, that there should be added the words, "including the land tax, £1,967,650; malt, £632,350; and the permanent taxes, £12,797,471."*

*Mr. Halkhead allowed that there had, indeed, been a woeful deficiency in the income of the first year, 1786, from what it had been stated by the select committee. But there was something, he said, unfair in fixing upon this particular year, 1786, and spreading the unfortunate deficiency of it over the average of all the others. Every year since the income of the country had improved. And why should not gentlemen, instead of taking an average of the four first years, take an average, which would be so much more favourable, of the two or three last? The last year had more than supplied the deficiency of the first. Mr. Halkhead then went at great length into the calculations, and argued with a view to prove that the resolutions of Mr. Sheridan were not founded on, but that the resolutions of the chancellor of the exchequer were agreeable to, facts.*

Mr. Sheridan said, why should the hon. gentleman wish to leave out the baneful year 1786, and yet avail himself of the prosperous 1790? This difference, so striking in the produce of different years, was easily accounted for. Means would be contrived by which the income of one year might, for a particular purpose, be swelled out, and the deficiency made to fall upon the next; and that with a view of making the income of the country appear in a more advantageous light than it could really bear, as was the case with the income of the year previous to 1786. Hence proceeded the deficiency which, according to the hon. gentleman's expression, had so woefully fallen upon that year. From the same cause he would venture to predict, that the income of the present year would not be equal to that of the preceding. That the extraordinary expenses were out of the view of the committee of 1786, Mr. Sheridan denied to be the case: but he had no objection to the right hon. gentleman's amendment, if the figures were right. The fair way of taking the land and malt taxes, he said, was on the annual produce, including the arrears of former years paid in; because the latter would, on an average, be pretty equal. The produce was over-calculated, and the interest of exchequer bills, from the way of making up the account, was underrated, making a difference of more than £40,000 a year.

*Mr. Pitt and Mr. Rose next spoke.*

Mr. Sheridan replied, that the advocates of the report of 1786 never could meet him before; and could not do it now, without taking into the account of the year 1790 many sums that were anticipations of the revenue of the current year. Yet with all this, and their five years tinkering of revenue laws, they were only able to show an average excess of about £50,000.



Strike off what they had got by new taxes and anticipations, and, he said, they would still be deficient to a great amount.

*The amendment was agreed to, and the resolution so amended passed the committee.*

Mr. Sheridan then moved the second resolution. He said it was taken from the resolution of 1786. He had left out some words, because they were more favourable to his argument than he thought it required. These he would add as an amendment; and let the committee then vote that words were not in the report, which were copied from it, if they could.

*The amendment was agreed to, and the resolution so amended negatived. The third and fourth resolutions were afterwards agreed to with some amendments. The chairman was ordered to report progress and ask leave to sit again to-morrow.*

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JUNE 7.

REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF 1791.

MR. SHERIDAN said, that those of his resolutions which had been already moved, had met with so discouraging a reception, that he now found he had nothing to gain, and that all his exertions in their favour would be useless. Having experienced, however, so much opposition to his statement of the income of the country, he should now only try whether the same opposition would be continued to his statement of its expenditure, and for this purpose go on with a few more of his resolutions. He should take occasion, at some future period, to bring them all forward in a form in which they might be inserted on the journals of the house.

*The resolutions from the 5th to the 10th were then read, and after some short and desultory conversation, successively negatived.*

Here Mr. Ryder moved,—“That the total amount of the interest and charges of the public debt, and of the sums issued for the reduction thereof, of the charges on the aggregate or consolidated fund, and of the sum granted for the supplies, during the last five years, excepting the sum of £207,000 which remained to be provided for in the present year, under the head of deficiency of grants, has been defrayed by the produce within the said years of the permanent taxes, by the annual aids on land and malt, and by the sums arising from extraordinary resources, with the addition of a loan of one million raised by tontine, and of £187,000 raised by short annuities.” Which motion, after some conversation, was carried.

They then proceeded to the 11th resolution, upon which Mr. Pitt moved an amendment,—“That the sum for defraying the armament of 1790, and keeping up the additional number of seamen, was defrayed independently of the ordinary

income." This amendment was adopted. The 12th, 13th, and 14th resolutions were then read, and negatived; the 15th was also negatived without a single objection stated; the 16th was agreed to; the 17th, with an amendment enumerating the several articles which raised the estimated expenditure of 1791 so much above that of 1786, was also agreed to.

Mr. Sheridan now moved an additional resolution, in substance "that the estimated expense of the navy, army, ordnance, militia, and miscellaneous services, by the report of the committee of 1791, exceeds that of the committee of 1786 by £434,293 which was agreed to.

The 18th was negatived, and the 19th, as dependent on the former, withdrawn.

On the 20th, Mr. Steele proposed amendments, stating that the excess of the sum voted for the service of 1791, above the estimate of the committee of 1786, includes various articles of expense, that will not occur again.

Mr. Steele's amendments were introduced, and the resolution agreed to. The 21st and 22nd were withdrawn; the 23d was agreed to, with an amendment; the 24th was negatived without any objection stated; in the 25th, Mr. Ryder introduced the substance of several others, though in a very different form; the 26th was withdrawn; the 27th, 28th, and 29th, were negatived without any objection stated.

Mr. Fox here observed, that the intention seemed to be to negative all that were evidently true, and that could neither be supported nor opposed by argument.

The 13th resolution was then read. Mr. Pitt moved an amendment, that the words from "that," to "money," be left out, which was accordingly adopted.

The 32d, 33d, and 34th resolutions were negatived.

Here Mr. Pitt moved, "That during the said five years the sum of £5,424,592 including £674,692 arising from the annuities expired or unclaimed, and from dividends on stock bought, has been applied to the reduction of the national debt; and that the annual interest on the stock bought, and the present amount of the annuities expired or unclaimed, appears to be £254,804, in addition to the million annually charged on the consolidated fund." The motion was put and carried.

The remaining resolutions, the 35th, 36th, 37th, 38th, and 39th, were all negatived.

The report was ordered to be received the next day.

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JUNE 8.

REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF 1791.

MR. SHERIDAN said, that unsuccessful as his exertions had been to obtain a true statement of the revenue and expenditure for the last five years, he would not, as his opponents had done, attempt to negative any resolution of fact. The resolutions which he had moved, he was certain, exhibited a more clear and



correct view of the finances than those contained in the report ; and for that reason he should move the previous question.

*The previous question was negatived, and a string of resolutions moved, and agreed to.*

Mr. Sheridan said, that having given notice of his intention to endeavour to get his resolutions put upon the journals, which could not be done by moving them in a committee, he should now move the first.

*Mr. Pitt said, that the resolutions having been fully discussed in the committee, he should move the previous question on every one of them ; and which being carried on all, except the last,*

Mr. Sheridan observed, that compelling the chancellor of the exchequer to resort to the previous question, was precisely what he had in view ; as it showed that the right hon. gentleman felt the resolutions to be facts, and dared not allow them to stand on the journals as negatived. Mr. Sheridan said, the last of his resolutions, with a little alteration in the preamble, was as applicable to the resolutions adopted by the house, as to those with which it was originally connected, and he should take the sense of the house upon it. He then moved,

“ That, upon due consideration of the report made this day from the committee of the whole house, to whom the consideration of the report from the select committee of 1791 was referred ; and also upon consideration of the two reports of 1786 and 1791 ; and of the several accounts before the house relative to the public income and expenditure, it appears proper and necessary to declare, that the great increase proposed to the permanent peace establishment, in the report of 1791, ought not to be considered as receiving countenance or approbation from the house of commons, until the causes of the same shall be explained, and the necessity of them made manifest.”

*The house divided—ayes 19 ; noes 34 ; majority 15.*

#### SUMS VOTED FOR CARLTON HOUSE.

*The report was brought up by Lord Sheffield, the chairman of the committee, who moved that it should, with an humble address, be submitted to his Majesty.*

MR. SHERIDAN recommended it to his lordship to move “ That the report lie on the table and be printed.” The object was, that the whole transaction might be fairly known, and the misrepresentations done away which had been circulated respecting it. This he wished more particularly, on account of the ex-

traordinary mistake of keeping back a paper (No. 5) which he had long contended was delivered in at the treasury, and which was at length produced. The omission had made a deep impression on many gentlemen; and was the more extraordinary, as that paper was the most important of all; showing how the money had been applied; and the papers first presented, among which another was substituted for this, contained a note, signed George Rose, stating "the commissioners of the treasury had no official knowledge of the application of the money after it was issued." Mr. Sheridan said, he did not mean to take any further notice of this; but he hoped those in whose care the paper was, would be severely reprimanded by their superiors for the neglect.

*The report was ordered to be printed.*

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FEBRUARY 17, 1792.

STATE OF THE PUBLIC INCOME AND EXPENDITURE.

*The house resolved itself into a committee, to consider the state of the finances. Mr. Pitt represented them in so favourable a light, that a diminution of the public burthens might reasonably be expected. The permanent taxes, from 1791 to the commencement of 1792, had produced £16,730,000; exceeding the average of the last four years about £500,000; deducting from which the total of the expenditure—amounting, by the reductions proposed, to £15,811,000—the permanent income would exceed the permanent expense, including the million annually appropriated to the extinction of the national debt, by no less than £400,000. The supplies wanted for the present year would amount to £5,654,000; for which the means provided amounted to a sum exceeding the former by £37,000. From the foregoing statement, Mr. Pitt was of opinion, that the surplus of the 400,000 would enable government to take off such taxes as bore chiefly on the poorer classes, to the amount of one-half of that sum; and to appropriate the other half to the diminution of the public debts. By the methods projected for the redemption of the debt, £25,000,000 would be paid off in the space of fifteen years; towards which the interest of the sums annually redeemed should be carried to the sinking fund, till the annual sum to be applied to the redemption of that debt amounted to £4,000,000. Having made this favourable representation of the state of the finances, Mr. Pitt finished by a warm eulogium on the actual prosperity of the nation.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, the splendour of the right hon. gentleman's speech had made such an impression on the committee,—they had been so led away by the figures of rhetoric from attending to the figures of arithmetic, that he should find it difficult to recal them to the true object of the discussion. He



fancied, however, this dazzling beauty would not be found so captivating to the people ; for, after the rapturous statement of prosperity which they had heard, it would be a disappointment to them that all accounts of surplus sunk so infinitely small. Who that had read or heard the reports of a surplus of £1,200,000, and of nearly £900,000 being actually in hand, would have believed that in truth the surplus would turn out to be no more than £58,000 ? He was generally incredulous on these anticipating reports ; but he confessed, when he heard of the king's coming down, announcing a surplus, and the minister immediately after, holding out taxes to be repealed, he thought there must be some stupendous increase of revenue ; and his confidence would have been greater, if he had not unfortunately heard all the minister's former pledges, and particularly that solemn, religious pledge, that no interruption should be made to the application of our surpluses, until they amounted to £4,000,000 a year. He then examined the statement of Mr. Pitt, and drew from his review this conclusion—that the increase of our prosperity had not brought with it a proportionate increase of our revenue. The increase of the latter was to be ascribed to the new burdens laid on the people, or to the regulations of the old taxes, which, in fact, were so many additions to them. Taking the reports of the two committees as his guide, he took the amount of the new and regulated war taxes from the general total, and showed that the actual increase of the permanent revenue since the year 1786, was £130,000. If he was asked fairly, from experience, whether the amount of our taxes was such as to warrant the legislature to dispense with a part of them, he would frankly answer no.—But if he was desired to revise the whole system of our taxation, to see if the people might not be materially relieved from the most grievous of their burdens, and the revenue be even improved thereby, he would yield his cheerful consent, and think that the house might render most essential service to their constituents. The plan pursued by the right hon. gentleman, which was calculated to embarrass the house, caused him and every gentleman an insurmountable difficulty. It was held out to the nation, that the crown, from a motive of endearment, had proposed relief to the people, and that the minister had even named the taxes which were to be abolished. If they should, from a sense of their

duty, declare this could not be done without a deviation from system, without hazard to the national credit, without disorder to the finances, the house of commons was about to be made odious to its constituents, and the crown was made the object of popular confidence. Such was precisely the case in which they stood; and yet, so far was this from being a proof of endearment, that it was a stratagem calculated to mislead and betray them. It was a complete surrender of the principle of redemption. We were now, in 1792, to redeem less stock than we did in 1786? for it was a clear proposition that, by the increased state of the funds, and by thus diverting so large a part of the surplus from its devoted and sacred end, we were to buy up less annuity than heretofore. What was the reason of all this? If the right hon. gentleman was called upon to say why, with this prosperous revenue, we were to redeem less debt, he would answer, because we could not afford it. Why the right hon. gentleman did not think it right to extinguish the unfunded debt, a great part of which bore interest, and hung about our necks with great inconvenience, as the right hon. gentleman felt in his Spanish armament, he could not take upon himself to say; he supposed it was that it would only be a proper, but not a splendid measure. It would be a great and effectual benefit to the revenue, but it would not serve the purposes of momentary fame, by taking off the odious taxes which he had laid on the year before. He now proved how well he could have opposed these taxes, if they had come from any other person; and the house would now find, by his own language, how much they had been to blame in yielding to the arguments by which they had been originally recommended. The house would see now, though the ungracious task had been imposed on them to lay these taxes, their constituents were not to look to them for their relief. A new feeling of hope was to be inspired in the people—a new feeling of gratitude was to be planted in their bosoms—they were to be taught to petition for relief from taxes. It was a very delicate subject for every gentleman to speak upon; it was laying an embargo on the house. No man could put himself into the ungracious state of opposing the repeal of afflicting taxes. Who could deny to the poor family the boon of getting their candles a halfpenny cheaper? If a severe sense of duty should urge gentlemen to look the true situation of the



country in the face, and to oppose this artful and insidious way of attacking the privileges of the commons' house of parliament, he knew well how easily a cry might be raised against him, and with what facility he might be made the victim of a little well-managed misrepresentation. He remembered a line or two of some verses made upon his hon. friend, by one of his constituents, which never failed to produce a torrent of applause; not so much from the elegance of the poetry, as from the sturdy *ad captandum* praise which it gave him. His friend, who, with all his merits, had certainly no pretension to the praise, would pardon him for repeating it:—

“ Whenever a tax in the house was projected,  
Great Fox he rose up and always objected.”

Now this, which was certainly untrue, might be turned very neatly to the detriment of those who might think it their duty to inquire before they acted—to ascertain whether we really had a surplus before we gave up our income; and, at any rate, the grace should come constitutionally from that branch of the legislature which had the power of the purse, and which had been called upon so unmercifully by the same right hon. gentleman to draw the strings. Why had he not waited, and given the house the grace of originating the measure? The truth was, it had been craftily considered as the best answer to all the imputations against him for the Russian and Spanish wars; so at least other men, who had less candour and respect for him than he possessed, would insinuate. They would draw strange conclusions from the circumstances; and the nation might be brought to think that blunders were more advantageous to them than wisdom:—that when he was convicted of error, he distributed to them relief. A session without a blunder would be a session of calamity; but an armament would be desirable. “ I have involved you in a quarrel with Spain—here, there’s a tax upon malt for you. I have made the English name ridiculous all over the world by bullying Russia—here take back the female servants. I have no use for them. I have involved you in a war with Tippoo Saib—take your candles a halfpenny cheaper in the pound.” Thus they are to be taught to love misfortune—to be enamoured of misconduct—and if an administration should succeed him, where wisdom and prudence produced their usual effects of security and quiet,

the right hon. gentleman would be at the head of the most violent and clamorous opposition that ever this country witnessed. They would call out for a change—"Give us back that bustling and dangerous administration, that went on arming and unarming; taxing and untaxing; who committed so many blunders that they were for ever making atonement; who broke our heads that they might give us a plaster. We abhor this uniform system of order and quiet." The sentiment this conduct was calculated to excite, was tumultuous and alarming; it was appealing from the judicious to the giddy; and, seriously speaking, every judicious man would know and feel, that if there had been no Russian armament, there would have been no repeal. He then showed that, by the original statute, the malt tax now to be abolished, would have endured only of itself a few months longer. But by this management, a considerable part of the exchequer bills issued for the Spanish armament might, in 1795, come on the consolidated fund, and be a grievous burden to us. He alluded to Mr. Dundas's assertion, that it was infinitely more probable that we should receive aid from India sooner than we should be called on for assistance to India,—an assertion at which Mr. Pitt, though he knew the full amount of his friend's confidence, could not suppress a degree of stifled astonishment. He seemed, on the occasion, to feel the sentiment expressed by Earl Cornwallis, "That he hoped he should never be reduced to a wretched and precarious dependence on the bazar of his Mah-ratta ally." He recalled the words of Mr. Dundas, that such was the awe and power of our arms in India, as to make us disregard its united force in array against us. Was he to believe this on the assertion of Lord Cornwallis—that the finances of the company were actually ruined by the protraction of the war? He concluded with saying, that in order to give to the nation the true benefit of wise reduction, if reduction was practicable, and to save them from the partialities likely to arise from the vanities of authorship, he should, at a future day, propose that a committee be appointed to revise the amount, nature, and effects of the taxes on the laborious and indigent classes of the community; and to report to the house what abolitions might be made therein. This he should at least propose, and place upon the journals.

*Mr. Pitt replied.*



Mr. Sheridan said, the right hon. gentleman had completely misrepresented what he said and meant, if he thought he gave him any credit for the surplus of the revenue, or the general prosperity of the country—the contrary was the fact; for he never had ascribed to his ingenuity either the one or the other, though he certainly had ascribed to his art and management the use that was made of both. With regard to India, he found that the hon. gentleman wished to say, that he coincided in opinion with his right hon. colleague; but he did not know whether the right hon. gentleman would thank him much for what he had said. The right hon. secretary had affirmed, that the fact would be as he had stated it; and the right hon. gentleman had said, hypothetically, that if the war is not terminated, he has not a doubt but it will be so when he comes to make conditions with the company for a renewal of their charter. He still thought that there was so much dread on the part of ministers about the opinion of the country on the war with Russia, which, but for the timely and constitutional interference in that house, they would have plunged us into, that they wished to avoid the effects of it by soothing the people with an idea of lightening their burdens and taking off taxes, most of which they had themselves put on. As to the arguments for preferring the mode of taking off taxes in place of paying a part of the unfunded debt, he was perfectly against it, because he thought that was where they ought to have begun. And he would only say that the minister, by taking one mode, might have done a silent, quiet, and essential benefit to the people; whereas, the one he has taken is an ostentatious, delusive, and dangerous appeal to popularity for the moment, without any regard either to principle, or the real lasting good of the country.

*At length the house coincided with Mr. Pitt's proposal for a repeal of those taxes on some articles that were the most unpopular.*

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FEBRUARY 24.

REPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY.

*The resolution for taking £400,000 from the consolidated fund, in addition to the million for the reduction of the public debt, being read,*

MR. SHERIDAN rose to call the attention of the house to the mode of anticipation which the minister seemed inclined to pur-

sue in his system of finance. He considered that anticipating the produce of a fifth quarter, was nothing but a loan from the ensuing year, because the money which was asked to be applied towards reducing the national debt, was really not in our possession; and voting money which we had not, without encroaching upon the produce of the ensuing year, appeared to him laying on a debt by borrowing from ourselves, and was worse than any other loan that we could obtain. He said, by this mode of anticipation, it was impossible that any actual statement of the public accounts could be made up or settled till after the 5th of April; and of course the revenue bills would all of them come to be discussed, as had been the case for several years past, in thin houses, and at a season of the year when it was not probable either that the attendance of members could be secured, or these revenue bills meet with that attention which their importance required. That this had been the case in former years, he believed no one could deny; and the unprecedented hurry and bustle which had accompanied those bills in their progress through the house, was in the recollection of every gentleman; as, by anticipating the quarter ending the 5th of April, not one of those bills could be passed till after the Easter recess; and he insisted that bills of the utmost consequence had been passed, in a manner, without any notice. The house had received a very striking instance, in what had fallen from a right hon. gentleman opposite to him, on the bill for granting and continuing bounties on the Greenland whale fishery; which, though brought into the house by himself, he seemed to have no knowledge of at all; and he said, with truth, that it passed last year without any notice. With regard to the attendance being thin after Easter, it might be said, if the revenue bills remained to be passed, it was the duty of members to attend; this was true, but experience had repeatedly shown us that it was not practicable. Upon this part of the subject he begged leave to address himself particularly to that respectable set of men, the country gentlemen, and no man could entertain greater respect for them than he did. The delaying of the revenue bills till a late period was a matter particularly interesting and important; it was their duty, in common with the rest of the house, and even more particularly so, to observe that vigilance and regard for the public income and expenditure, and that scrupulous attention to every measure that took



money from the pockets of their constituents, so much and so properly enforced in the conclusion of the right hon. gentleman's celebrated finance speech. They were the stewards of the public purse; and he would ask how it would become them to meet their constituents before the public business of the session had been entered upon? Might not their constituents say, "We are very glad to see you; but pray tell us, is all the business of the session over?" Would they answer,—“No; the tax bills, and all the other revenue laws are still to be passed, but so late in the session, we could not wait till they came on; we have left the whole of that business to the chancellor of the exchequer, whom we believe to be a very good sort of man, and who will not think of doing anything wrong.” This, he imagined, would not be thought quite doing the duty of a member of parliament. He next objected to this system of anticipation, because there was no saying how far it might be carried; and the greater the ability of the minister, there was the more cause to fear its pernicious effects. If we could anticipate the produce of one quarter, by borrowing it from the ensuing year, might we not, upon greater emergency, anticipate two quarters, or three? The advantage which this system held out, when compared with the many and great inconveniences attending it, was very small indeed; and if the right hon. gentleman would wait till he had got the money, certainly his plan would not be much deranged. Perhaps it might fortunately happen that the three quarters of the next year might be equal to the wants of the whole year; and, in that case, the right hon. gentleman would have the surplus of the other quarter to appropriate as might appear proper; but, until that was known to be the case, they were voting away money which they really had not to give. So much for the system itself; now for the application of it. If we really had a sum of £400,000 to apply, it ought to be applied towards paying off a part of the unfunded debt; which, it had been stated by the committee of 1786, ought never to be allowed to exceed £1,700,000. It was now considerably more, and part bearing interest of four per cent. By doing this, instead of buying up three per cents., he said, the country would be a gainer; and with regard to the probability of being sooner able to come at the five per cents., by the actual reduction of twenty-five millions of the national debt, he could not see that the right hon. gentle-

man's scheme would answer that purpose ; for, certainly, whilst such a load of unfunded debt remained unpaid, he could not, by any fair construction of the law, or by any thing but a kind of juggle, pretend to redeem the five per cents. The discharge of such a part, at least, of the unfunded debt as bore interest would, undoubtedly, be a more proper application of the money, although not, perhaps, so sounding and popular.

His third objection was, that the money would be wanted for the expenses of the year, unless it was meant to have recourse to a lottery—a mode of raising money which he had often deprecated as infinitely more injurious to the morals and industry of the people, than it could possibly be advantageous to the revenue. It was formerly never resorted to but in time of war and public necessity ; and he was sorry to hear it was intended to be continued in time of peace.

He concluded with stating, that his first proposition would be, that the £400,000 should go to the ways and means of the year, so that the accounts of income and expenditure might in future be made up on the 5th of January ; and if he should fail in that, his second would be, that it should be applied to the discharge of the unfunded debt ; but in order to introduce either of these, it was first necessary to move that the report be re-committed.

*Mr. Rose, Mr. Steele, Mr. Fox, and Mr. Pitt followed.*

Mr. Sheridan, after expressing his hopes that the house would indulge him in greater latitude of explanation than was strictly regular, on account of the turn which the debate had taken, said he should leave the two gentlemen (Mr. Rose and Mr. Steele) who had given it this turn, to the silent rebuke of the contrast between their mode of treating the question and that of their right hon. friend. They seemed to think that they had a claim upon him to be dull when he spoke on finance, and were offended at his attempting to enliven a discussion on which they were determined to be harsh and dry. He had revived what they were pleased to call the old joke, because he was called to do so by the old subject, the mode of making up the public accounts, which had hitherto postponed the most important business to so late a period of the session as prevented a full attendance. He thought he was doing the hon. gentleman who first replied to him a service, by recommending a mode of proceeding which would enable him to seek the shade of his forests early in the



summer, and smooth and civilize his mind, by classical pursuits, from the asperity and moroseness it might have contracted in the less grateful exercise of parliamentary duties. No captious opposition had been made to new taxes from those who sat on the same side of the house with him, but when they did object, their objections were well founded. They had now substantial proof in the shop tax, the additional tax on candles, the tax on female servants, the additional tax on malt; in short, all the taxes they had opposed were either abandoned in the first instance or since repealed. The regulation of taxes they had not opposed as unproductive, but as doing what no increase of productiveness could justify—sacrificing the constitution and the liberty of the subject to revenue. Yet, even these regulations had, in many instances, effected nothing that might not have been accomplished without them. If, for instance, the produce of the tobacco licences, in all respects a new tax, was deducted from the amount of the duties, it would be found they were not more productive under the management of the excise than they had been at a former period. The intimation that the budget should in future be opened at an earlier period, although not amounting to an absolute promise, was at least something gained, and he rejoiced in having been the means of obtaining it. It was a lame mode of reviewing an annual account before that account was closed; and this Mr. Pitt seemed to feel by his never having attempted it before. But if by this mode, lame as it was, part of the inconvenience arising from the anticipation of the consolidated fund would be obviated, the impropriety of the application stood precisely where it did. A charge for the interest of navy debt of about £20,000 was admitted, which charge £500,000 would extinguish, and might be much more advantageously applied to that purpose than to the purchase of three per cents. The revenue committee of 1786, and the house, by adopting their report, had given an assurance to the public that in future the navy debt should never be allowed to accumulate so as to bear interest. Surely, if any regard was due to the reports of committees, and the assurances held out by the sanction of the house, the terms ought to be kept when they had the means of keeping them.

An hon. gentleman (Mr. Rose) had said, that when he was in the high and important office of secretary to the treasury, the sinking fund had been anticipated for three quarters; as if a per-

son in that subordinate situation was to be responsible for all the measures of finance. The character of a measure might sometimes point out the author; and when he saw dull and blundering tax bills brought forward with little of mind, and nothing of liberality, in which cunning was substituted for wisdom, and tricking for intelligence, he could not help supposing that they were not the production of any man in the superior departments of office, and attributing them to some of his subordinates. In justice, however, to the honourable men who thought him worthy of a situation under them, it was necessary to remark, that they had never proposed the anticipation alluded to as part of a system, and that it was with them only a temporary and unavoidable expedient to cover an old deficiency.

He had avoided a general discussion of the revenue and expenditure, because he was bound by propriety and the order of debate, to confine himself to a particular point. But did it follow from that, as had been inferred, that he abandoned all the other points he had maintained? On the contrary, he was ready to maintain them every one whenever called upon to debate them collectively or singly. It was a most curious mode of arguing, that as often as he objected to any one of the contested statements on finance, he must either go through all the rest, or be understood to admit them as true. It was equally curious to infer that, because he admitted there was at last a surplus of revenue to justify the application of a million annually to the extinction of debt, he admitted also, that there was such a surplus six years ago, and every year since that time. They might as well tell him he had pledged himself to prove that the revenue would not exceed the expenditure in the present century, or in the next, or that the deficiency must be eternal.

While they maintained this verbal dispute, they had paid him the substantial compliment of adopting his opinions. They had taken an average of four years as the proper estimate of future revenue; they admitted, that the estimate of expenditure by the committee of 1786, could not be realised, and added £500,000 to his estimate in 1791; and they had admitted, as he contended, that the estimate of 1791 was larger than it ought to be, and proposed a reduction. But they imposed on the house of commons the ungracious task of proposing an addition to the expenditure, and now took to themselves the more pleasing office of suggesting



a reduction, although they were the real authors of both whilst they were making a reduction of £200,000 in appearance, but had, in fact, made an addition of £300,000 to their own estimate of 1786. He referred to the house whether a case had been made out to induce them to vote in anticipation, the invariable consequence of which had hitherto been to put off the important business of finance till a season of the year when many gentlemen could not attend the discharge of their duty. He entreated them to consider what that duty had been, and what it was likely to be in future. It had hitherto been to impose on their constituents some fresh burdens, or some new restraint, in the shape of a regulation. The fortunate period was at length arrived, when they were told it would be in their power to alleviate those burdens; and it was of importance that the people should not be taught, that for taxes and penalties they were indebted to their representatives, but for ease and relief to the crown.

*Mr. Pitt said it had always been his wish, and would be so in future to open the budget at an early period of the session, but he could not make a positive promise on a subject that must be governed by circumstances.*

*The question being put that the report be committed,*

Mr. Sheridan said, that part of his object being obtained, viz. that the business of the finance should not be postponed in future till the summer months, he should not divide the house as he before intended.

*The report was agreed to.*

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FEBRUARY 29.

ARMAMENT AGAINST RUSSIA.

*Mr. Whitbread opened the debate by a long and eloquent speech, which he concluded by moving that Oczakow was not of sufficient importance to warrant the armed interference of Great Britain.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that nothing should have induced him at so late an hour to trespass on the almost exhausted patience of the house, but his astonishment at the contemptuous silence of the minister, that consistency of insult, that climax of haughtiness, with which he had treated the house, and now refused to answer on the day of his trial. He had formerly told them that when the day of discussion came he would assign the reasons for his conduct. The day of discussion was come, and he was silent. If he thought himself sufficiently defended by those who had under-

taken to plead his cause, he was much deceived; for he had involved himself in a labyrinth of difficulties which had not a path that did not lead to disgrace. If he had any defence to make, it was a secret locked up in his own breast, neither communicated to his friends, nor imparted to his colleagues. Every succeeding defender confuted the defender that had gone before him.

If they had asked how they should plead his cause he could not tell. If they maintained that Oczakow was of no consequence, they could not answer his exposing the country to the hazard of war on account of it; if they maintained that it was of consequence to justify an armament, they could not answer his giving it up. If they said that he yielded to the opinion of the house, they must be told that the majority of the house was with him; if they said that he yielded to the opinion of the public, the opinion of the public was against his arming. On neither side could he escape. If he was wrong in his principle, he ought to be disgraced; if he was right, he ought to be impeached for abandoning it. If, indeed, Russia, commanding a numerous and hardy race of subjects, possessing great extent of territory, without disunion, and accumulation of power without unwieldiness, were to take possession of Constantinople, to occupy the Euxine, the Hamoaze and Catwater with her fleets, where no European eye could see or examine their force till they poured into the Mediterranean, then he would admit that her power might be dangerous to this country; but before he admitted that we were to arm to prevent this danger, the minister should prove that it was probable; and if he did this he must stand convicted of a great crime in abandoning an object of so much importance, without laying such information before parliament as would enable parliament to compare the probability of the danger with the practicability of preventing it. An hon. gentleman, whose more than promise of great abilities men of all parties must have rejoiced to hear, had execrated the impolicy of the ministers of Charles II., in not opposing the early ambition of Louis XIV. If one side of the minister's defence was well founded, he might live to execrate his impolicy in neglecting to oppose the ambition of Russia after equipping an armament for the purpose. If his own majority forgave him, the minority readily might. To the latter he had bowed as the organs of the public voice; to the former he said, in deeds more forcible than words, "I know what stuff my ma-



majority is made of, and how little its voice can be called the voice of the public." It was common for him to change his principles, to come forward with propositions on commerce, fortifications and armaments, with "unless these are adopted I cannot be useful as a minister. I cannot be accountable for the defence of the country, I cannot answer for the balance of Europe." And the moment they were rejected or abandoned, to congratulate the house on the prosperity of commerce, the security of the nation, and the favourable situation of the European powers. These were charges which he must not be suffered to put upon the house. The minority would bind him to the principle they had opposed, and convict him on it—he had almost said the majority, which he thought they might, but hoped they would not, that they might not be mistaken for the former majority on the same subject.

The hon. gentleman to whose speech he before alluded, had found it necessary, in explaining his system, to take into account the restoration of France, in order to provide us with a proper enemy. If something, he had said, like the old government should be restored in France, we should then have all the ambition, treachery and chicanery to deal with, of which he formerly complained. If a free government should be established, we should then have a neighbouring power less likely, indeed, to be at war with us, but much more formidable whenever war should occur. How then ought we to prepare ourselves for meeting the energy and vigour which a free government might give to France? How, but by fortifying our constitution, by recalling it to its true principles, and banishing from it this proud reserve in ministers which disdained to give information; and this unmeaning confidence in parliament, which could vote money without it. Instead of this we were advised to take up the vices which France was throwing away; we must meddle and interfere in the affairs of other powers; we must have Holland for our ally, and Prussia to protect Holland. That Austria may not attack Prussia, we must excite the Turks against Austria; and to enable the Turks to defend themselves against Russia, we must get Sweden to make war on Russia,—however far we went on, something more was still wanting. Like the earth, supported by an eagle, the eagle by the elephant, the elephant by a tortoise, &c. A support was always wanted for the last supporter. All this we had done; and what had we got by it?—disgrace, contempt, and reprobation.

He would advise the hon. gentleman who traced out this system to abjure it in time, as neither according with the English constitution nor the English character. Double dealing might be of service to despotic governments ; it might serve a despotic minister, and perhaps be of temporary service to a country ; but the occasional advantage was more than ten times overbalanced by the mischiefs it brought with it. The mere clerks of despotism, in this respect, would be an overmatch for the legislators of a free state. The character of our constitution was manly, frank, and undisguised. He loved to see the minister assimilate his character to that of the constitution. He would love in it those qualities which he himself possessed ; every sympathy of his nature would dispose him to reverence and to cherish them ; and pursuing ostensible objects by direct and honourable means, he would tower, by the natural energy of candour and wisdom, above the miserable props of chicane and cunning. If, instead of this, a minister should assimilate the character of the constitution to his own, his progress might be towering indeed in lofty misery, but it would be bottomed in shallow craft.

The hon. gentleman whose speech he had more than once quoted, had unguardedly, in the course of his speech, talked of the want of good faith of the emperor. Such language, when speaking of crowned heads, was always improper, because generally unwise, and frequently dangerous. How did the hon. gentleman know that we might not soon have occasion to court the emperor, as we had lately courted the empress, of whose breach of faith, a few months since, that house and the country rung again ; though now we had changed our minds so much, that her bare word was considered by us as a sufficient security for engagements of the most important nature.

He now came, he said, to the papers. He referred to the memorable speech of a worthy magistrate, Mr. Brook Watson, whose eloquence was easily remembered, as it was never flippant and unemphatic. He had called on the house to turn their eyes from the south-west of America to the north-east of Europe, as the true destination of the armament then preparing. The right hon. gentleman thought proper to deny this account given of the destination of the fleet, and parliament had been pestered with it in a double sense. He should, from the papers, suppose that they had, in truth, been treacherous even to Russia, and he quoted a



passage to show that they held a double language to that court, and pretended to follow up and act upon its system, while in reality they were offering to Russia their good offices, evidently to get themselves out of the dilemma in which they were involved. They prayed only for the free navigation of the Dniester as an *adou-cissement*. This was the term made use of as a sweetener, or as a similar term had been once called, a *dulcifier*, to satisfy the people. The empress, with a vein of sarcasm, granted them the sweetener, but by making them parties, and, as it were, allies in her new system of armed neutrality; for she made it a stipulation that they should go to the Porte and demand the same on their part. The entry of the grand vizier (Mr. Pitt) into the divan, accompanied by the *reis effendi* near him (Mr. Dundas), must have been a very curious spectacle.

He thanked his hon. friend for the thought. What sort of reception, and what sort of dialogue must have taken place? "Well," they must have asked him, "what glorious terms have you procured with your grand fleet? Have you humbled Russia? Does she tremble at your power? Does she crouch? Have you burnt her fleets for us? Have you demolished Petersburg?" A melancholy "No!" must have been the answer to all these interrogatories. "What! does she not repent that she provoked you? but have you made her give up Oczakow? that your sovereign has pledged himself for!" "No, none of all this." Instead of telling them to be tranquil in their minds, instead of assuring them that the pigeon of Mahomet might perch in safety, and no longer fear that the eagle of Russia would pounce upon the harmless victim—they must say, "No, none of all this. But we have engaged that if you do not comply with every tittle that she demanded of you before we presumed to interfere, we shall abandon you to all the consequences of war."

He challenged the right hon. gentleman with continuing the armament not to produce acquiescence in his demand, but it had its continuance in a deeper cause—from that proud, obstinate spirit, that would not confess its error. It was kept up, and all the violence of impressing continued, to preserve a haughty appearance of character for himself when he had sacrificed the dignity of his royal master; and the fleet of England was made to ride in affected pomp, but in truth a disgraceful array, at Spit-head, exhibiting in novel manœuvres the ziz-zag type of his own

conduct. He then spoke of the confidence which had been the topic of discussion, and he laid it down as an invariable maxim in the constitution, that no money should be called for, and taken out of the pockets of the people, without stating the positive use to which it was to be applied.

*The debate was adjourned to the following day, when Mr. Whitbread's motion was rejected by 244 against 116.*

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MARCH 26.

ROYAL BURGHS OF SCOTLAND.

MR. SHERIDAN gave notice of his intention, early after the Easter recess, to make a motion for a reform of the royal burghs of Scotland.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF WOODS AND FORESTS.

*The house having resolved itself into a committee on this report, Mr. Pitt observed that upon the present occasion he would not trouble gentlemen by entering into the particulars of the reports before them; every gentleman in the committee, he said, must be fully convinced of the necessity of the adoption of some measure for the preservation and increase of timber for our navy; to that point he should call the attention of the committee, and not to anything relative to the crown lands, the final report on which had not yet been made. In what he had to submit to the committee he should confine himself to the report on the New Forest in Hampshire. The first proposition in the bill he should move for, would be to enable his Majesty to empower the enclosing of 20,000 acres of the forest for the growth of timber, and to give powers to the persons appointed for the said purpose to throw open as much of the enclosure as might be sufficiently grown, and to enclose an equal quantity of the forest for the purpose of always keeping 20,000 acres enclosed. In the bill also would be a provision of compensation to the persons who had a right of common in the forest, and that provision which, he said, would be an ample one, was intended to be the confining of the deer, which his Majesty had a right at present to let run throughout the whole forest, to certain parts. The second provision of the bill would be to prevent injury to the timber; and the third, for the presentation of periodical reports to parliament. He concluded by moving, that the chairman be directed to move the house for leave to bring in a bill for the preservation and increase of the timber in the New Forest, &c. &c.*

Mr. Sheridan lamented that the right hon. gentleman had not gone more fully into his plan, which, he said, would, in his opinion, prove to be a matter of great importance, and to which there would be no inconsiderable objection. It was a matter of regret, he said, that after seven years' employ, the commissioners had not been enabled to make out a final report on the crown



lands. He had hoped that such a report would have been ready; and that the right hon. gentleman's proposition of that day would have been one great scheme for the public benefit. In this expectation, however, he had been deceived; he would not, nevertheless, upon the present occasion, trouble gentlemen farther than he had done, but reserved himself till the production of the bill.

*The question was put and carried.*

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APRIL 4.

LOTTERY BILL.

*The order of the day being read for committing that bill to a committee of the whole house,*

MR. SHERIDAN said, he had omitted no one opportunity since he had enjoyed the honour of a seat in that house, of opposing lotteries; however, the subject had been so fully discussed, and so ably argued, that he should not have spoken upon it at all, but from what had fallen from the right hon. gentleman. He had expected, Mr. Sheridan said, the right hon. gentleman would have sat silent and abashed, conscious that he could not advance a single argument in favour of a practice so destructive and mischievous, as raising revenue by lotteries. The right honourable gentleman, from what he had said, seemed to think the wisest way to get rid of this evil was by degrees. On the contrary, Mr. Sheridan said, he was for an immediate, not a gradual, abolition of lotteries. The right hon. gentleman had said, the drawing could not be shorter than usual, because the bargain was struck; he agreed with the right hon. gentleman that they must keep to their bargain; but was not what the right hon. gentleman had said, an argument against having any lottery at all? The hon. gentleman (Mr. Rose), Mr. Sheridan observed, had said, if we had no lottery, Ireland would have one; did not every body know that a lottery in Ireland was not a measure moved by an indifferent member of the Irish house of commons, jumping up and proposing a lottery, but was a measure of the government; and if the chancellor of the exchequer of Ireland did not move a lottery as a part of the finance of the year, the government of Ireland would institute no lottery there? The whole, it was well known, depended on the government here. The minister said that all the measures of the ways and means were already brought forward; that was very true; but the house was

not bound to give him a discretionary power over things that appeared unwise; for his part, it should be remembered, that he, at the opening of the business, had objected to this very measure. If the minister must have a discretionary power over £300,000, Mr. Sheridan declared it to be his opinion, that the better way would be for the house to vote him that sum of money to be raised on exchequer bills; and in the mean time the lottery bill to be suspended until an inquiry should be had into all the abuses which had already been so well described. Here Mr. Sheridan recounted many of the evils of the lottery as they came to his knowledge, when on a committee upon that subject. At first they pawned ornaments and superfluities—then furniture that could most easily be spared—and last, came their beds, implements and tools of trade, the very clasps of their children's shoes, and even the clothes of the cradle. He believed there was not anything in this metropolis that gave such pangs of affliction to the human heart as the lottery. In short, the pawnbroker had declared, he was at last ashamed of his profession from the wretchedness it enabled him to witness. Mr. Sheridan, on the whole of these considerations, advised the giving up of the lottery altogether; and said, the profits might be supplied by the chancellor of the exchequer issuing exchequer bills to the amount of £300,000, he hoped therefore the bill would at least be suspended for the present.

*The motion for the speaker leaving the chair was put and carried, and the bill committed.*

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APRIL 5.

ROYAL BURGHS IN SCOTLAND.



MR. SHERIDAN said, that on the part of those who had for their object the internal regulation of the royal burghs in Scotland, everything had been done to entitle them to have an inquiry made into the subject. They had made out all the allegations of their petition, and they were now before the house. On a former occasion the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) had called on him to specify his complaint, and then said, he could not go into it at that time, and wished that it should not be persevered in that session. To this he assented, and oral and written evidence was afterwards collected to satisfy the scruples of the right hon. gentleman. He had the evidence now ready. The gen-



tle men on the other side had had their time to send to Scotland, to the proper officers, for any documents they might think fit for the support of what they might maintain to be the proper defence of the rights belonging to these royal burghs; and the question now was, whether the allegations of the petitions he had presented, complaining of abuses in these royal burghs, were true or false. He asserted that abuses such as had been complained of did exist. The right hon. gentleman denied that—there they were at issue; and that was the fact which he wished to have decided—that was the object which he should have in the proposition which he should make; for which purpose he should move for a committee to inquire into it. He should prefer a committee of the whole house; but that he would not have any dispute, he should refer it, if the right hon. gentleman wished it, to a select committee; but as he could not see what objection could be made to either, he should move, “That on Tuesday, the 17th instant, this house will resolve itself into a committee of the whole house, to take into consideration the matter of the petition, and other papers presented to this house last session of parliament, relative to the royal boroughs of Scotland.”

*Mr. Dundas opposed the motion.*

Mr. Sheridan might have been astonished at this mode of objecting to his propositions, one after another regularly, as he made them, did he not know the principal on which they were founded, and the reason for them. The truth was, that they shunned the inquiry, and wished to evade it by any means they could devise; anything but a fair and candid contest of the point in issue he expected; but he would promise gentlemen on the other side they should not get over the business in that way. As to the time being too far advanced in the session, and the idea that business of importance was chiefly over, he must observe, in the first place, that it was not in his power, without manifest inconvenience, to have brought on this subject in February, as the right hon. gentleman had hinted ought to have been done; he was obliged to attend to other objects, which it was not for the house to hear; and the more particularly so when they recollected, that whenever the subject came forward, it was always, in the mind of the right hon. gentleman, either too late or too early. As to the other point, namely, that most of the business of importance was over, he must say, that if he had not already b

so much experience of the shifts and shuffles of the right hon. gentleman on this occasion, he should have been surprised at this. What would he say to his own notice this very day, of bringing forward, six days after the day for this motion, propositions upon the slave trade? Was that important? Was it early enough for that, although too late for the consideration of the Scots' boroughs? Or did he believe that many gentlemen at that time would be in the country, instead of attending to their duties in parliament?—There were two descriptions of persons in this country: those who attempted to reform everything, and those who were determined to reform nothing—they were both dangerous persons; but in the degree of danger from these doctrines there was no comparison. No man could be so great an enemy to the constitution of England itself, as he who maintained it was perfect, and on that principle resisted all attempts to reform it, and branded those who attempted it as wild speculators, and dealers in dangerous innovation.

*Mr. Pitt said, he thought that the general objections to the present system ought to be known, and the abuses pointed out, before the house went into a committee; when that was the case, and the hon. gentleman could point out the specific remedy to be adopted, the sooner the question came to be discussed the better. He thought the hon. gentleman had fixed on a wrong day, because the second reading of the Westminster police bill stood for the 17th; and though he trusted there was not much difference of opinion on that subject, yet if it should go into any length of discussion, it could not be expected that those who brought it forward would give way to the discussion of the hon. gentleman's motion, notice of which was subsequent to the other.*

Mr. Sheridan hoped there would be no occasion to put off his motion after the day he had mentioned, but he must say one word respecting the lateness of the session, which was, that he recollected a time when the right hon. gentleman opposite had brought forward a great constitutional question respecting a reform in the representation of the people, even at a later period than what he now proposed for this question.

Mr. Sheridan contended that there were many reasons which prevented him from pressing the business; formerly he had often thought it an improper time to press anything that looked like reform; because, by some strange perversion, any improvement proposed was converted into ideas of innovation and revolution. He had, however, now got possession of sufficient materials, and had given up his own opinion to that of others, and he was de-



terminated to bring the motion on. He did not mind what the right hon. gentleman thought of his assiduity ; but, if he had been slow, the right hon. gentleman would find that he was secure in his purpose, and he had heard nothing to make him postpone the business longer. As to reforms, he thought those who called for unnecessary reform, and those who said that there was no occasion for any reform, were equally enemies to constitutional principles.

Mr. Sheridan thought all the objections stated would have come in time enough in the committee. He enumerated the materials, such as the charters and acts of burghs which had been violated with impunity, and many other facts which he would prove when the committee sat ; and contended, the only opposition therefore that could be made, was as to the time of the session, upon which he thought enough had been said to obviate it. He contended, that there was no power of control vested in any court in Scotland over the transactions of magistrates, which was an important point at issue between the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) and himself.

*Mr. Dundas replied ; and after a few words from Mr. Pitt, the motion was put and negatived. After which,*

Mr. Sheridan moved, " That on Wednesday, the 18th of April, this house do take into consideration the petitions and other papers on their table, relative to abuses practised in the internal management of the royal boroughs in Scotland."

*The motion was agreed to.*

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APRIL 17.

BILL FOR REGULATING THE OFFICE OF JUSTICE OF THE PEACE  
FOR SUCH PART OF THE COUNTY OF MIDDLESEX AS LIES IN  
AND NEAR THE METROPOLIS, &c.

*The order of the day for the second reading of this bill being moved,*

MR. SHERIDAN observed, that the business now before the house, the justices' trade, had long occupied his attention. He had more than once, with a gentleman of the law, thought of something like a plan for its regulation. But the point by which he had always been checked, was the consideration of undue influence. He could not hit upon a plan that would prevent the thing from being or becoming a job. All the systems of regulation which he had seen in this respect were nothing more, and he

was afraid never would be anything else than a job. He admitted that there were necessary regulations with regard to the fees of these persons, but they would all be trifled with and evaded. As to the remark that they should be dismissed from their offices if they did not act right, he feared the security in that respect was not very solid or satisfactory to those who wished to see the magistrates independent. He thought they should lose their offices if they voted wrong at an election; and so no doubt they would, if they procured votes by remitting the penalties of the lottery act—or excused an elector, or an election agent of a court candidate, part of an excise fine for election service. Care, no doubt, would be taken they should act with integrity in these cases. To be serious, he was convinced that this system of police was nothing more than a system of influence.

*The bill was read a second time.*

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APRIL 18.

ROYAL BURGHS IN SCOTLAND.

MR. SHERIDAN said, that from what had been said on the other side of the house upon this subject, he was in hopes that his motion for the speaker leaving the chair would have been assented to as a matter of course, and he still hoped that when gentlemen recollected the whole of the subject now brought forward, they would not persevere in their opposition to that mode of proceeding, and that they would not endeavour to induce or call upon the house to depart from its own pledge, and that they would not offer an insult to a body of men whom he had the honour to support on the present occasion. If they did take this method of opposition, he must say they did not themselves seem to recollect how the matter in question stood, and for the purpose of refreshing their recollections he should state the real situation of the business.

Some years since a number of petitions from the royal burghs of Scotland, unanimously pointing out grievances and demanding redress, were presented to that house. The number of royal burghs were in all sixty-six, and at this time fifty of them had concurred in their complaint. These comprised a vast majority of all the trade, commerce, wealth and population of the burghs of North Britain. They comprised also a great part of the rank and dig-



nity of it. Persons thus situated, and thus complaining, were worthy of the attention of that house, and most particularly that of the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas). These petitions stated the general mismanagement, misapplication of money, dilapidation of property, and various injuries and grievances sustained by them, in consequence of the usurped authority of certain self-elected magistrates in these burghs; and that to these complaints there was at present no redress to be procured under the law of Scotland. They had sought for redress, but were unable to obtain it in such a situation. He was clearly of opinion that the only application they could make was an application to parliament; for he maintained that it was a decided point that there was not now a court of competent jurisdiction to afford relief to these complainants. If that was the case, the application to parliament was correct and regular. This was denied by gentlemen on the other side. Here the parties were at issue. The point now remaining to be tried should be submitted to a committee of inquiry—if they could prove these facts, they would immediately fall under the wisdom of parliament to have that redress which is due from its justice. Three sessions ago he presented a bill to that house with a view to investigate these complaints and remove the cause of them. The bill was read a first time. When it came to a second reading he pledged himself to prove every article of allegation in these petitions. The gentlemen opposite to him said that they were grievances of great magnitude. They admitted that if they could be proved redress ought to and should be granted; but they said he was irregular in his application, and that he ought to institute a committee of inquiry, and, if he proved his facts, redress must follow: upon this he withdrew his bill, conceiving that then he was at issue with them upon the facts of these grievances, and that if he proved them redress would follow. He then proceeded, he said, to the establishment of these facts, for which purpose he caused copies to be made of all the charters of these burghs and all the acts. He sought for the accounts of the public property and all alienations, &c. The next session only a part of these was produced, some of the burghs being deficient in that respect; afterwards, however, the whole became complete. Last session of parliament the whole came before the house, and it was proposed to go into a committee of inquiry upon the case, that facts might be ascertained upon which to ground

the future proceeding of the house. Upon this the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) did not pretend to deny these facts, nor had he an idea in his mind that the right hon. gentleman harboured a thought of insulting the people of Scotland so grossly as to say to them "Now you have collected your proofs, and have prepared to submit your case to the house of commons you shall not be heard; I will not now consent to inquire; you shall be repulsed—I was only jesting with you formerly; now I tell you plainly that that apparent frankness was a mere mockery." Nothing of this kind was said last year. On the contrary, there was an implied assent to the inquiry, only it was then stated to be too late in the session. Upon this principle, and seemingly with a fair prospect of ultimate success, a motion was made on the 27th of May last, and the house entered into a resolution which he begged the house to hear. (The resolution was then read, the purport of it was that the house would early in the then next session take into consideration the state of the royal burghs.) Here it was evident that it was the intention of the house to go fairly into this inquiry. This could only be done in a committee, and to refuse a committee was to refuse every thing that could relate to the subject. He had a right to call on the right hon. gentleman, not only from the duty he owed to the people of North Britain, but also from a sense he ought to have of his own personal honour, to consent to this inquiry. He did not expect he should hear—at least he should not be content with hearing—that it was not now early in the session; it was too mean a quibble to be attended to for a moment—it was too paltry an excuse to merit an answer. Was the session so far advanced as to leave no business remaining that was of importance sufficient to be discussed to insure a full attendance? was not the business of the slave trade of that description? Did not the chancellor of the exchequer bring forward his plan for a reformation of the representative body of the whole kingdom at a much later period? Did not the right hon. gentleman himself bring forward his own India inquiries at a later period? Did he suppose that the whole body of the people of Scotland would be satisfied, and that it was quite safe for him to treat them and their representations with contempt; if he did, and if he thought himself possessed of address sufficient to amuse them in that way, he feared the right hon. gentleman a little deceived himself upon that subject. The claims



of this great body of men must be attended to by the house. What did the right hon. gentleman mean to do with the pledge of that house, when, instead of submitting to inquiry, or stating by argument any principle of justice on which the inquiry could be refused, he sheltered himself under flimsy evasions and petty cavils. The fact was that he knew that inquiry would produce truth—truth would demand justice—justice would be fatal to the cause of the right hon. gentleman. He was ashamed to have his cause exposed; but let him remember he was vigilantly watched in England, and would be faithfully reported in Scotland, and that if he thought these petty shifts would pass upon the people of North Britain, he was deceived in them, and did not know them so well as he thought he did, nor would he be sure of the continuance of their favour.

The other objection was a little curious, as it had been started on a former day. He meant that the other party called on him to show a specific remedy to the abuse he complained of before the house should enter into this inquiry. This was recommended to the chancellor of the exchequer as an observation to be made; and it was a little hard on that right hon. gentleman, because it was giving him a ridiculous character to support; for he said on a former occasion to him, "Do not call upon us for a remedy until you have shown us your grievance." Now that was the very thing; for before he asked for a remedy, he proposed, in a committee of inquiry, to prove his grievance, and if he failed, he would be content to abandon his application for the remedy. But it was too ridiculous to call upon him to show his grievance, if they refused him the only means by which he could show it; and, in refusing, pretend to say that the refusal was because he did not specify his remedy. But this was not all; he had, in fact, produced the remedy; it was specified in his bill, and the principle of it was admitted in the debate on the second reading, and the only reason then given for not passing the bill was, that first there should have been established a proof of the grievance. He was willing to go farther—he would state what the object of his bill was now. It was to abolish the self-electing power of the magistrates in these boroughs—without which nothing like justice could be done to the body of people who complained; for all attempts at palliations, however tried, would be found fruitless.

He had heard it said that there were such grievances in Eng-

land as well as in Scotland. Was this any reason for giving redress to neither—was justice to be defeated by a community of oppression? If he was to be asked whether there was any abuse in the boroughs in England, he said, he was ashamed to confess he had no doubt of it: but he must follow up that confession with an observation, that when any extraordinary waste or misapplication of the property of a borough took place in England, there was something like a mode of inquiry into it possible; but that was not the case in Scotland—there was no court of judicature known there which could admit the inquiry. Supposing, for a moment, that there was no court in England competent to entertain inquiries into the abuses of officers in boroughs, and that great abuses were stated to exist in three-fourths of the whole kingdom, what would be the fate of a motion in that house for a committee of inquiry? Would it not be granted? most willingly and eagerly. Why should the case be different with regard to Scotland? and why should not every member of that house think himself bound to examine into the abuses of both, or assent to a proposal for a committee to inquire? He did not think that the people of Scotland should be treated in that way. The right hon. gentleman particularly should not treat them so—he ought to know them better than to think they would for ever bear such insults. Let but the truth appear, and he would pledge himself that it should appear, if the committee was granted, that not one of the allegations in the petitions would turn out to be false, but that all the abuses of which they complained would be made manifest. It had been asserted by the right hon. gentleman that there were in Scotland courts competent to take cognizance of the grievances specified in the petitions. He did not wish to give his opinion on the law of Scotland without first having consulted the opinion of others, who were much more competent to decide that case than himself; but he had consulted a gentleman of great legal knowledge on that subject, and the result of that consultation was, that there was not any court of judicature that could take cognizance of the grievances stated in these petitions. How was this point to be settled? If it should afterwards be found that there was any competent jurisdiction for the hearing of these complaints, and, on proof, redressing them, then the petitioners should be sent thither; but it was ridiculous to refuse to hear whether the case was so or not, merely on the assertion of any in-



dividual who wished to stifle the inquiry. He stated that he wished for nothing to be granted in consequence of this inquiry, even supposing him to prove the abuses stated in the petitions, but what was granted in the different charters, and which had been defeated, by abuse having grown into usage, and now, in Scotland, usage had become paramount to all law. It was not, therefore, favour that he was asking, it was justice; it was not to introduce any new mode, but to amend an old one; it was to reform abuse.

Of late it had become a fashion to decry everything in the nature of reform. It was carried so far as to become a principle in support of general oppression. This brought on a temper that would hardly hear of anything like reform. Opinions were entertained that reform led to innovation—innovation to revolution—revolution to anarchy and disorder; and, therefore, that a door should not be opened to reform. No man who knew the spirit of the constitution of this country could support this sort of principle. It was the best part of our constitution that it contained a principle of reform in its very nature; and we had, at this day, nothing in it that was beautiful that had not been forced from tyrants and taken from the usurpations of despotism. But there was something, it was said, in the present time, which should deter us from thinking of reform now, and that was, because there had been a revolution in France. There was a time, when some persons thought nobody should even allude to it; that it was unsafe, and almost indecent to mention it. That time was passed; and we had now no choice upon that subject. It was an event well known to all ranks and descriptions of persons; it made part of the contemplation of the studious—the conversation of the social and communicative; it formed part of the taste of our public entertainments, and mingled in our melody; it was no longer an object to be dreaded; and, with the sober and the serious, the only question was, “What wisdom was to be gained by it?” For, with regard to the event itself, and the peace of this country in consequence of it, there needed be but one feeling on the subject,—exultation and joy at the downfall of the despotism of France, the greatest enemy England ever had. That despotism, whose ambitious, turbulent, and restless spirit cost England so many thousands of her subjects and so many millions of her money;—that despotism—that foe

to the happiness of the human race—was destroyed. Soon should we—indeed we already had—felt the beneficial effects of the French revolution. The National Assembly of France was the best committee of supply England ever had. The safety of our possessions in India was owing to the French Revolution; and therefore that event, in this point of view, was the greatest blessing that could happen to this country. By assuring us tranquillity abroad, it afforded us leisure to look into abuses at home; and neither to be intimidated into dangerous compliance with popular clamour on the one hand—nor too ready to listen to the fears of the most timid on the danger of innovation, on the other:—such was the season to correct abuses. But, according to the opinions of some of the most moderate and well-informed men in this country, there were a number of principles maintained by the National Assembly of France which would militate, ultimately, against the true principle of well-regulated liberty. Upon this he could only say, that if all the eloquent octavos that were filled with the highest praise of the French Revolution were changed into folios, all that could be said in them would be, at last, reducible to this:—that the destruction of a despotic government is an act of the highest wisdom in a people; and that, when this was accomplished, the higher order, and the most enlightened class, will feel, and really possess, all the natural advantages of their fair superiority; while the lower orders of the people will fall into the rank of useful industry, which was the nerve and sinew of a well-regulated society. But this theory of France had been carried too far, and it had been brought into discussion in this country. That it had been brought into discussion he admitted; that the theory had been carried too far, was matter of speculative opinion which had nothing to do with the real interest of this country, and upon which he should say nothing; but that, if France, under the reign of despotism, had produced statesmen capable of regenerating a government all at once, or a people capable of instantly performing the duties and observing the subordination necessary to a free constitution, he should have thought the vices of her old government far less than he did at present. The thing for us to attend to was, a rational and sober reformation of abuses, at a time when there was nothing to interrupt us. This was the only way by which we should be sure of avoiding the evil that might attend a re-



formation by violence; for if, to every request of the people, their representatives refused to listen, under an idea that some encroachments might be made on the prerogative of the crown, the effect in time would be, that the people would suspect parliament of having too intimate an alliance with the power of the crown; and, by this popular distrust, they would be at last, in their defence, driven to the throne for shelter against popular resentment, and compelled to fortify the place in which they took refuge. This was the most sure way of making a real division in the country.—It was well-known that every body thought upon public subjects: there was a spirit of inquiry excited amongst all classes of men; it increased every day, and every hour;—experience taught us it was impossible to check it; wisdom ought to teach us to prevent it from becoming dangerous; for so it would become, if the people had any reason to suspect their grievances were treated with contempt. By first resolving only to procure redress for grievances, they might fly to anarchy and confusion. If we suffered this, it would be too late to talk about the probable mischief of reform. He must then say to the house, that unless they wished to encourage the idea that the people should have no relief, however pressing their necessities, or however just their claims—unless they wished to tell the people they really had no friends in the house of commons, and that their rights were totally neglected—they would yield redress with cheerfulness, when fairly claimed. This was the only way to keep the people of this country contented with their condition. One proof of a disposition to attend to the wishes of the people would have more effect, in preserving their attachment to the constitution, than all the eloquent speeches that had been made to praise it. These were not sentiments peculiar to him; the propriety of them must be felt by every man who heard him. He rejoiced that they were not merely felt, but adopted as a principle of action; that men, whose characters, situations, and consequence placed them above the suspicion of sinister motives, had resolved to rear a standard to which all who sought redress of grievance, or reform of abuse, by loyal and constitutional means, might repair with confidence. This was the true course to prevent the people from putting themselves under leaders whose object might be, not so much to reform, as to destroy. Those who had undertaken it would, he trusted, follow up with the same youthful ardour, but

more steady perseverance than the right hon. gentleman opposite (Mr. Pitt) that reform which had been the first object of his political life. Indeed, it was but a bad compliment to the constitution, to say it was a building which we could not touch without the danger of its overthrow. Such a building, the people would be too ready to view as an old edifice so far decayed as to be incapable of support. He who now obstinately refused to listen to proposals for a temperate reform, must be destitute of prudence and discretion. He then moved,

“That, the house of commons having received petitions from forty-six of the royal burghs of Scotland, complaining of various grievances in the government of the said burghs; and the house, after taking the same into consideration, having, on the 17th of February, 1788, ordered that notorial copies and sets of the royal burghs should be laid before this house; and then having made several other orders for accounts of the cess, stent or land tax levied in the said burghs, and of the sums of money paid the receiver-general on account of the same; and for accounts of the revenues of the said burghs, and for accounts of the land of the said burghs alienated since the union; and then having, on the 10th of June, 1790, renewed such orders; and in obedience to the said orders, a great many accounts having been laid before this house;—it is incumbent on this house to proceed to the examination of the said papers and accounts in such mode as shall best ascertain whether the grievances complained of are true, and what remedy this house ought to apply to such grievances.”

*The Lord Advocate of Scotland, Mr. Fox, Mr. Anstruther, Mr. Steele, Mr. Dundas, Sir J. Johnstone, and Mr. Rolle followed. The latter gentleman observed, that his regard for the constitution led him to oppose every motion for reform that had been or could be brought forward; and as to what the hon. gentleman had concluded his speech with, that this was the proper time for reform and innovation, he must declare that the hon. gentleman had delivered one of the most inflammatory, wicked, and dangerous speeches he had ever heard; and as long as he had a seat in parliament he was determined never to countenance any species of reform whatever, because he knew the constitution of this country was the best and most admirable in the world. With regard to what had been said about the gradual abolition of the slave trade, he had voted for that, and he was happy to think that many petitioners for the total abolition were well satisfied with the step that was taken.*

Mr. Sheridan hoped the house would grant him the indulgence usually granted to the mover of a question—that of making a short reply to the several arguments urged against it. To



the hon. gentleman (Mr. Rolle) who, with so much knowledge of the rules and language of debate, had declared his former speech to be inflammatory and wicked, he begged leave to make use of a right hon. gentleman's words, as addressed to himself, and to assure the hon. gentleman, nothing he could say should either ruffle his temper or disturb his tranquillity of mind. The hon. gentleman who was so zealous an admirer of the constitution, was content to admire it upon trust, without examining its principles, or comparing its excellencies with its defects—and in this he acted wisely ; for to do the one, required only confidence in the commendations bestowed by others ; but to do the other, required knowledge and understanding. If the hon. gentleman had observed the same discretion with respect to his speech, he would have saved himself the trouble of applying to it terms which it did not deserve. Had he waited to form an opinion on trust, from the opinions of others, he would have thought it neither inflammatory nor wicked ; for he would venture to assert there was not another gentleman in the house who had formed such an opinion. He had no wish to break the rest of the right hon. gentleman, or to make his meals uncomfortable ; for, of all the members of administration, the right hon. gentleman, by his open and manly way of doing things, whether right or wrong, had conciliated his good opinion the most. He could, therefore, have no intention of making him uneasy, and rejoiced to have the right hon. gentleman's own word for it that he had not. Notwithstanding the composure with which the right hon. gentleman had began, he had soon forgot he was not to be angry, and expressed himself in tones that did not indicate quite so much calmness as he professed. If that was the consequence of any thing he had said, it was not the object. The object was to prevail on the right hon. gentleman to agree to go into the committee for which he had moved, and in that he had succeeded ; for he now understood the right hon. gentleman did agree. [Mr. Dundas said across the table, " No ! No !" ]—To what then, said Mr. Sheridan, did the right hon. gentleman agree ? for I appeal to the recollection of the house, whether his words did not clearly imply his assent to a committee—[Mr. Pitt whispered to Mr. Dundas]—I wish, said Mr. Sheridan, the right hon. gentleman may not be prompted. I should be glad that he had no watchmen set over him on this occasion but mine. [Mr. Dundas said, he had

not consented to a committee of inquiry.]—Mr. Sheridan proceeded: he was at a loss where to find the right hon. gentleman's meaning. He had formerly brought in a bill, on the presumption that the abuses it meant to remedy did exist, with a view that those who thought they did not, might have an opportunity of proving, in the committee on the bill, that it was unnecessary, if they had the means of doing so. He was then told by the right hon. gentleman his mode of proceeding was irregular; that he began where he ought to end; and the proper course would be, first to call for evidence to prove the existence of the grievance, and then propose his remedy. He had adopted the suggestion, and now the evidence was on the table, and he was ready to prove the grievances did exist, he was denied the proper parliamentary means, and called upon to bring forward the remedy he proposed. He was not unprepared upon that subject; but as he knew few gentlemen, perhaps not the right hon. gentleman himself, had examined, or even perused the evidence on the table, he felt the difficulty of calling upon them to vote resolutions on documents which they had not read. If gentlemen compelled him to proceed in this manner, it was impossible to believe they were serious, or that they did not wish to get rid of an investigation which they were afraid to meet. The right hon. gentleman had affected to say that he was not sincere in his prosecution of this business. The right hon. gentleman had, doubtless, been too attentive to the consistency of his own political conduct, to attend much to that of so humble an individual as himself; and this must be his excuse for an assertion which he could not support by a single fact. He called upon the right hon. gentleman to mention a time in which he had not been as zealous an advocate for the rights of the people, as he professed to be at present. That those rights were sacred, and that reform was necessary wherever they were violated, were the first political principles he had adopted. With those principles he had come into parliament; with those principles he had connected himself with men who merited his confidence and the confidence of their country. If the right hon. gentleman supposed he had abandoned those principles, that he was under any party influence or private obligation that withheld him from acting upon them, he desired, once for all, to tell him he was grossly misinformed. The right hon. gentleman talked of his own popularity in Scotland; that



he had stood candidate for a county, and carried his election against all the influence of government, by more than three to one; with much more implied by his manner, which his natural modesty would not allow him to express by words. But then came the conclusion—all this was before he was tried as a political man; and from that time to the present he had taken care to have the influence of government in his favour. To this popularity he would advise him not to trust with too much confidence, any more than to the boasted apathy of his temper. He admitted, the right hon. gentleman would not wince for trifles—as Montesquieu said, “you must slay a Muscovite to make him feel”—and the right hon. gentleman had sometimes shown that even his insensibility was not impregnable. It was impossible to proceed with any degree of regularity or effect without a committee. As soon as that was granted, he would move certain propositions arising out of the evidence; the particular points of which he should select, and every member would have an opportunity of examining and controverting them, which could not be done so fully in any other mode. To this it was objected, that admitting the abuses, the remedy which he proposed, instead of being a benefit, instead of encouraging a liberal spirit of industry and promoting the prosperity of the burghs, would introduce misery and confusion; and, in support of this argument, they who adduced it stumbled on Paisley, as an instance of increasing wealth under the old system. Now, it so happened, that Paisley was not under that system, nor had any such grievances to check its industry as those complained of by the petitioners. It was, therefore, an instance to his purpose, not to their’s; and gave reason to presume that the decay and poverty of various other places were owing to the abuses of their internal government. Neither was his wish to alter the mode of electing the councils, which to him seemed the only effectual remedy, a well-founded objection. When the house was satisfied there were abuses to correct, it would then be as open to them to adopt that remedy which to their wisdom should seem the best, as if he had never proposed any remedy at all. It was now admitted the burghers at large had no means of control over the expenditure of their money; that they had not even access to the accounts kept by the council, and could not apply to any tribunal to compel the production of them. Was not this a flagrant and scandalous grievance?

Was it not as incredible as any he had stated? And yet, for this, no remedy had ever been proposed. He should prove also, if allowed the means, that more was raised under the head of cess than was paid to government. Some of the accounts on the table showed a considerable difference between the assessments and the payments; and although the balance might have been honestly disposed of, the circumstance was a presumption of malversation, and a sufficient ground for inquiry. When the learned lord mentioned the cases in which he had been employed as an advocate, he believed he had forgotten that one of them was a case of dues of another kind. His declaration on these occasions was, doubtless, worthy of higher praise than it would have been becoming for the learned lord to bestow; but he feared it might have been the occasion of the loss of the cause; and had he been the client, he should have begged the learned lord to spare his declamation, and stick as closely as possible to the facts and law. But what was the nature of this remedy, admitting it to exist? Every poor man—every industrious manufacturer whose daily labour was barely sufficient to maintain his wife and family, was to proceed by a separate action. If he conceived that he was overcharged, he must pay his money in the first instance, and then leave his home to apply to some tribunal, or pay for the declamation of an advocate to get it back. In this pursuit he would have the satisfaction of knowing that he must pay all his own expenses, and contribute his share to the expense of the defence; for it was the invariable rule that the magistrates defended all suits against them out of the public purse, and levied money accordingly. This was the miserable remedy held out to the poor and industrious, on whom such overcharges were likely to fall the heaviest, even by those who affirmed that a remedy did exist. Could any man imagine that it ever was effectual? Yet even this remedy they had not in fact; for, as they had not access to the accounts supposed to be kept by the magistrates, and as the cess was blended with other dues, they had no means of discovering, much less of proving, that overcharges were made. There was proof, also, of abuse in the alienation of property. They who denied this, admitted that they knew of no case in which redress had been obtained, although they said there was a remedy; and the reason was the same as in the other abuses—there were no means of coming at the accounts. It was only since the papers



had been called for by the house that the private deposits of the councils had been unlocked, and some of the abuses, of which they contained the proofs, brought to light. His hon. friend (Mr. Anstruther) had said, that the charters were worded in terms which time had rendered obscure ; and that usage, in all cases, was held to be the best explanation. He affirmed, that all the charters on the table, without exception, gave, in clear and express terms, the rights of electing the magistrates to the burghesses, and not to the magistrates to elect their successors. The act of 1649, which made sets of the burghs what they now were, expressly admitted the clear interpretation of the charters ; and, like all acts for depriving men of their right of franchise, assigned reasons for doing so ; and among others, recited the abuses and inconveniences of popular elections, as those who disliked that mode did now. If the house of commons, when they passed the septennial bill—which they had as much right to do, as to pass an act creating them all dukes, marquisses, and earls—had passed a bill reciting all the real and supposed abuses of popular elections ; that, therefore, it was fit to put an end to such elections ; and enacting that the members of that, and each succeeding house, should elect their own successors ; what security would the people have had, either that no more money should be levied on them in taxes than was necessary, or that they should have a fair account of its application ? Were such a proposition to be now made, what would be the opinion of his hon. friend ? He knew too well the integrity of his heart and the rectitude of his understanding, not to be assured that he would meet it with indignant opposition. Yet the situation of the people of Great Britain would then be no worse than that of the burghers of Scotland, under the present system of self-elected councils. It was easy to lavish praises on the constitution, but it became the house of commons to praise it, not by their words, but their actions ; to endeavour to extend the spirit and the principles of it to all the inferior constitutions under its protection. It mattered little to tell him that there were similar abuses in English boroughs. It was a poor satisfaction to the petitioner from Scotland to be told that his English fellow-subject endured the same grievance. There might, for anything he knew to the contrary, be more to reform in England than in Scotland ; but, while those who felt the grievance did not complain—while they did not petition for

redress—it was not his business to move such reforms. When they did complain—when they did apply in an orderly and constitutional manner for redress, whether from Scotland or England—they were entitled to every degree of attention that parliament could bestow. The power of electing their own magistrates, he was convinced, would do more to correct abuses than any other remedy that could be devised. Magistrates so elected, it was said, might be as arbitrary in levying money, and as profuse in spending it, as the present. If they were, the people would have a speedy remedy; they might turn out those magistrates, choose honester men, and call the defaulters to account. Abuse might be accidental, but could not be systematic. The effect of this remedy would even be to turn out the opulent burghers, and let in the poor. He did not like it the better on this account; but as matters stood, it would do just the reverse; for the persons in possession of the corporations on the present system were, in general, the meanest. In proof of this, he read over the names of the counsel at Pittenweem, with the quality of each—colliers, tailors, weavers, &c., and asked if those were men more respectable than were likely to be chosen by a popular election?

An hon. baronet (Sir J. Johnstone) had candidly said, an abuse being admitted to exist, he would vote for a committee. The hon. baronet, in a public letter, had formerly said, that considering himself as trustee for the counsels of the burghs whom he represented, he should think it nefarious in him to do anything to abridge or abolish their privileges. This was, no doubt, the feeling of many other gentlemen. They considered themselves not as the representatives of the people, but as counsels of the burghs by whom they were elected; which accounted for the little support he received from the gentlemen from Scotland; and there was reason to suppose, that the same corporation spirit operated on many of the representatives of English boroughs. There was no need to fear but that if the committee was granted, the Scots' burghs would meet with all the support to which they were entitled. There was no such thing as popular election in Scotland. The people there had no political weight. If the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) would turn his attention to this point, if he would give them the political weight which the people in all free governments ought to possess, he would bind them more strongly to their native



soil,—he would attach them more firmly to the constitution, than by empty praises which they could not feel, because they had little among them to which they could refer. The redress for which he moved should not be got rid of by any dexterity of management on the present occasion, nor any direct refusal to inquire. It was in its nature such as must, and should be granted. He begged pardon for the expressions; but when he knew the petitioners were resolved to persevere, deeply impressed as he was with the justice of their claim, it was not too much presumption to say, that in a time of increasing reason and declining prejudice, the cause of truth must gain by every discussion, until it was finally carried.

*Mr. Pitt said, the motion was neither such as ought to be negatived nor passed. The hon. gentlemen might move his proposition of reform, and then the house might go into a committee to consider of it, if that should seem proper. He therefore recommended to withdraw the motion and take the other course. If the motion was persisted in he should move to adjourn.*

Mr. Sheridan recapitulated his reasons for proceeding as he had done. If he was allowed to go into a committee, he had gained his end, and would withdraw his present motion. In that committee he should move propositions of fact, founded on the evidence; and on these propositions, when reported and agreed to by the house, he should move his remedy.

*Mr. Dundas asked if the alteration of the present sets of the burghs was not his object?*

Mr. Sheridan said his object was, first to establish the facts, which he trusted the evidence would accomplish; and then, to propose a bill founded on those facts.

*Mr. Dundas again objected, that to propose an alteration of the sets of the burghs was the avowed object of going into a committee.*

Mr. Sheridan again said, it was impossible for any proposition of his, in the shape of a remedy, to be argued fairly, till it was shown there was a grievance that called for it.

*Mr. Pitt asked if the hon. gentleman meant to withdraw his motion?*

Mr. Sheridan withdrew his motion, and then moved,

“That the several petitions, papers, and accounts, presented to the house in the last parliament, relative to the internal government of the royal burghs of Scotland, be referred to the consideration of a committee.

*Mr. Pitt said, this was the same motion on which the house had been debating*

*irregularly before, and the same in substance with that which was negatived before the holidays. The materials for judging were on the table; and if gentlemen thought that they contained no grounds for the remedy intimated by the hon. gentleman, they would do right in voting against going into the committee.*

*The house divided on the motion for referring the papers, &c. to a committee—ayes 27; noes 69.*

Mr. Sheridan, in strong terms, expressed his surprise at this decision, and said the business should not be so dismissed. The petitioners were determined to persevere; and while that was the case, he would persist in bringing it forward from day to day, and from session to session, under the persuasion that the house would be their counsel—that they had only to adduce their proofs—they had not desired leave to substantiate their case by counsel at the bar. This they might now feel to be a proper step; he should consult them upon it to-morrow, and give an early notice of a motion for admitting them to be heard by counsel, or of bringing forward their complaint in some other shape.

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APRIL 30.

ROYAL BURGHS IN SCOTLAND.

MR. SHERIDAN presented a petition on the behalf of the burgesses of the royal boroughs of Scotland, stating the progress of their case before the house, referring to their petition formerly presented to the house, and now praying to be heard by their counsel at the bar of the house, to prove the existence of the grievances complained of, and stating that they were perfectly ready for that purpose.

*Mr. Dundas objected to the receiving the petition on account of the informality of the mode proposed, for that it referred to a former petition, and also the lateness of the session; and also, that if such a petition should be heard at all, the burgesses who do not complain, and those who are charged with having committed abuses, should have notice of this proceeding, for which there was no time in the present session.*

Mr. Sheridan derided the petty shifts made use of to keep justice aloof from the present case. He was denied the committee to inquire, because he was told, that first he should establish the existence of some grievances before the house could think of giving its time to the subject; and that when he was going to do so in the most regular way, he was told he should not be heard at all. The truth was, there was but one objection,



and one wish in the mind of the right hon. gentleman who opposed this—an objection to the complaints because they were true, and a wish to defeat the application, because it was just. However, in his endeavours to conceal the subject from the public view, he should not succeed; for although defeated so often by influence, he should still persist until he accomplished his object; he should move, on some day in the present session, a string of resolutions that would be descriptive of the state of these burghs, the truth of which the right hon. gentleman would not dare to combat. He had told him on a former day, he should be carefully watched here, and faithfully reported in Scotland; and he on that occasion had been pleased to talk of his popularity. Since that time he had received letters from different parts, and from the most enlightened, as well as the most respectable persons in Scotland, and they spoke of the right hon. secretary in terms not very flattering to his popularity.

*The question was put, that the petition be received, and passed in the negative.*

#### PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

*In the spring of this year an association took place among several persons of consequence, in and out of parliament, the purpose of whose uniting was to obtain a reform in the representation of the people.\* It soon counted among its*

\* The following is a copy of the declaration and address of the society.

Freemasons' Tavern, 26th April, 1792.

At a General Meeting of the Society established on the 11th inst., under the title of THE FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE, associated for the purpose of obtaining a Parliamentary Reform, William Henry Lambton, Esq. in the chair.

Received a report from the committee appointed by the resolution of the 19th instant, consisting of the following persons:—

William Baker, Esq., M.P., chairman; Charles Grey, Esq., M.P.; Samuel Whitbread, jun., Esq., M.P.; John Wharton, Esq., M.P.; Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Esq., M.P.; Philip Francis, Esq., M.P.; Hon. Thomas Maitland, M.P.; William Henry Lambton, Esq., M.P.; George Rous, Esq.; John Godfrey, Esq.; William Cuninghame, Esq.; James Mackintosh, Esq.

Read a draught of an address to the people of Great Britain, contained in the report of the committee.

Resolved unanimously, That the said address be approved of and adopted by this meeting.

Resolved unanimously, That the declaration already agreed on, together with the said address, be printed and published, with the names of the subscribing members, and that the committee be instructed to print and publish the same.

*members some of the most conspicuous characters among the merchants and literary men throughout the kingdom. They published their sentiments and resolutions with great spirit and freedom; and determined, in the ensuing session, to make a formal motion for a reform in the parliamentary representation. Con-*

#### DECLARATION.

A number of persons having seriously reviewed and considered the actual situation of public affairs and state of the kingdom, and having communicated to each other their opinions on these subjects, have agreed and determined to institute a society for the purpose of proposing to parliament and to the country, and of promoting, to the utmost of their power, the following constitutional objects, making the preservation of the constitution, on its true principles, the foundation of all their proceedings.

First.—To restore the freedom of election, and a more equal representation of the people in parliament,

Secondly.—To secure to the people a more frequent exercise of their right of electing their representatives.

The persons who have signed their names to this agreement think, that these two fundamental measures will furnish the power and the means of correcting the abuses which appear to them to have arisen from a neglect of the acknowledged principles of the constitution, and of accomplishing those subordinate objects of reform which they deem to be essential to the liberties of the people, and to the good government of the kingdom.

Signed, &c.

#### ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE OF GREAT BRITAIN.

No man who is not ready to express his concurrence in our principles, by signing the declaration, can be admitted into our society. The objects of it, as we conceive, are of a nature at all times fit to be pursued and recommended to the country. At different periods they have heretofore been avowed and supported by the highest authorities in this kingdom; by eminent individuals and considerable bodies of men; by Mr. Locke and Judge Blackstone; by the late Earl of Chatham and Sir George Saville; by the Duke of Richmond, the Marquis of Lansdowne, Mr. Pitt, and Mr. Fox; by petitions from several counties, and by repeated declarations from the city of London.

In appealing to the avowed opinions of men of established reputation, or of distinguished rank in their country, we do not mean to strengthen the reason, or enforce the necessity of the measure we propose, so much as to obviate all personal imputations which the enemies of the cause will be ready to throw upon those who support it. It is not that on our own account we dread the effect, or regard the impression which such imputations may produce, but we think it material to the credit and success of our proceedings to show, that we are not aiming at reforms unthought of by wise and virtuous men: that our opinions neither possess the advantage, nor are liable to the objection of novelty; and that we cannot be accused or suspected of factious purposes or dangerous designs, without extending the same accusation or suspicion to the motives of men whose situation and property, independent of their character,



*formably to the plan proposed, Mr. Grey gave notice, on the 30th of April, that he intended in the following session to carry into execution the design proposed by the society. He founded its propriety on the opinion of the leading men in the house. Mr. Fox and Mr. Pitt had both declared themselves unequivocally on this*

principles, and abilities, have given them a most important stake in the peace and good government of the kingdom.

Convinced by our own reflections, by experience, and by authority, that the thing we propose to do is fit to be done, we have with equal deliberation weighed the reasons that may recommend or be objected to the present time, as the most or least proper for bringing it forward. On this point we have no address to make to the determined enemies of a reform of every kind. Their objection, whether valid or not, is to the substance of the measure, and cannot be abated by circumstance. To those who concur generally in the principle, but who may be inclined by particular reasons to defer the attempt, we seriously wish to submit the following considerations:—That admitting this to be a season of general tranquillity in the country, it is on that account the more proper for temperate reflection and prudent exertions to accomplish any necessary improvement; it is the time when practical measures for that purpose are most likely to be adopted with discretion and pursued with moderation. If we are persuaded to wait for other times of a different complexion, for times of public complaint or general discontent, we shall then be told that general remedies are not fit to be proposed in the moment of particular disorder, and that it is our duty to wait for the return of quiet days unless we mean to create or increase confusion in the country. The result of this dilemma, if it be suffered to prevail, is pure and absolute inactivity at present and for ever. On the other hand, if it be true, as we are convinced it is, that in this general appearance of tranquillity there is some mixture of discontent, as well as of strong and well-grounded opinion on the subject of abuses in the government and corruptions of the constitution, we wish it to be considered by men whose judgment has been formed or enlightened by experience, and whose actions are most likely to be directed by prudence, whether, in taking proper measures to remove the cause and objects of such discontent and opinion, the choice of the time be not a material part of the measure; and whether the earliest time that can be taken for preventing the increase of an existing evil be not the safest and the best?

The example and situation of another kingdom are held out to deter us from innovations of any kind. We say, that the reforms we have in view are not innovations. Our intention is, not to change but to restore; not to displace, but to reinstate the constitution upon its true principles and original ground. In the conduct of persons most likely to reproach us with a spirit of innovation, we see a solid ground for retorting the imputation. Their professions of admiration of the beauty, and of zeal for the security, of the constitution, appear to us too lavish to be sincere, especially when compared with those practical violations with which they suffer this beautiful system to be invaded, and to which they never refuse to give their concurrence. They will not innovate but they are no enemies to gradual decay, as if the changes insensibly

*matter, and the majority of the nation was of the same opinion. The critical state of the times had induced those who saw the necessity of obviating the probable consequences of the general discontents throughout the great body of the*

produced by time, and nourished by neglect, were not in effect the most dangerous innovations. But what security have we that the dispositions of such men are not something worse than passive? How are we assured that in praising the constitution their intention is not to adorn a victim which they wish to sacrifice, and to flatter the beauty they are endeavouring to corrupt? Let their intention be what it may, we answer their accusation in the words of one of the wisest of mankind: \* "That time is the greatest innovator; and if time of course alter things to the worse, and if wisdom and counsel shall not alter them to the better, what shall be the end?"

By the reform proposed by Lord Chatham,† he declared in the house of lords, that he meant to *infuse a portion of new health into the constitution*. The Duke of Richmond has declared,‡ that "his reasons in favour of a parliamentary reform were formed on the experience of twenty-six years, which, whether in or out of government, had equally convinced him that the restoration of a genuine house of commons, by a renovation of the rights of the people, was the only remedy against that system of corruption which had brought the nation to disgrace and poverty, and threatened it with the loss of liberty."

Other authorities in favour of a parliamentary reform, as direct and explicit as these, might be quoted in abundance. The public is possessed of them. We rather wish to encounter, because we are sure we can efface, in every rational mind, the impression which may have been made by a view of those events which have attended a total change in the constitution of France. We deny the existence of any resemblance whatever between the cases of the two kingdoms; and we utterly disclaim the necessity of resorting to similar remedies. We do not believe that at this day an absolute avowed despotism, in the hands of the executive power, would be endured in this country. But who can say to what conclusion the silent, unresisted operation of abuses, incessantly acting and constantly increasing, may lead us hereafter; what habits it may gradually create; what power it may finally establish? The abuses in the government of France were suffered to gather and accumulate until nothing but an irruption could put an end to them. The discontent of the people was converted into despair. Preventive remedies were either not thought of in time, or were not proposed until it was too late to apply them with effect. The subversion of the ancient government ensued. The inference from this comparison is at once so powerful and so obvious that we know not by what argument to illustrate or enforce it. We mean to avert for ever from our country the calamities inseparable from such convulsions. If there be, as it is said, in any part of this kingdom, a disposition to promote confusion, or even to arrive at improvement by unconstitutional and irregular courses, we hold ourselves as strictly pledged to resist that disposition wherever it may appear, as to pursue our own objects by the unexceptionable methods. If, on the contrary, it be

\* Lord Bacon.

† Jan. 22, 1770.

‡ Jan. 17, 1783.



*put an end to their incessant complaints of being, what they justly styled, misrepresented, and made the instruments of ministerial projects, in which their in-people, to frame such a system of representing them as might, by its equitableness,*

true that the mass of the people are satisfied with the present state of things, or indifferent about it; if they approve of the representation as it stands, the form of election and the duration of the trust; or if, condemning these things, they are determined, from indolence or despair, not to attempt to correct them; then, indeed, the efforts of individuals may be ineffectual, but they cannot be injurious to the peace of the community. If the spirit of the constitution be dead in the hearts of the people, no human industry can revive it. To affirm that extensive mischief may be done by a statement of facts or arguments which make no general impression on the public mind, is a proposition that contradicts itself and requires no other refutation. We trust it will be proved by experiment that these inconsistent assertions are equally unfounded, and that the people of this country are no more disposed to submit to abuses without complaint, than to look for redress in any proceedings repugnant to the laws, or unwarranted by the constitution. Between anarchy and despotism, speaking for ourselves, we have no choice to make—we have no preference to give. We neither admit the necessity, nor can we endure the idea of resorting to either of these extremities as a refuge from the other. The course we are determined to pursue is equally distant from both.

Finally, we assert, that it must be blindness not to see, and treachery not to acknowledge,

That “the instruments of power are not perhaps so open and avowed as they formerly were; and, therefore, are the less liable to jealous and invidious reflections, but they are not the weaker upon that account. In short, our national debts and taxes have, in their natural consequences, thrown such a weight of power into the executive scale of government, as we cannot think was intended by our patriotic ancestors, who gloriously struggled for the abolition of the then formidable parts of the prerogative, and, by an unaccountable want of foresight, established this system in their stead.” \* Our general object is to recover and preserve the true balance of the constitution.

These are the principles of our association, and, on our steady adherence to them, we look with a just confidence to the approbation and support of the people in the prosecution of our object. A measure so likely to be opposed by the united strength of various interests can never succeed but by the declared and hearty concurrence of the nation.

Resolved unanimously, That a motion be made in the house of commons at an early period in the next session of parliament, for introducing a parliamentary reform.

Resolved unanimously, That Charles Grey, Esq., be requested to move, and the Hon. Thomas Erskine to second, the above motion.

Signed, by the unanimous order of the meeting,

W. H. LAMBTON, Chairman.

\* Blackstone.

*terests were sacrificed to the ambitious views of their superiors. This declaration called up Mr. Pitt, who inveighed with uncommon warmth against the designs of the society. This was not a time, he said, for moving questions that involved the peace and safety of the nation, and endangered the constitution of the kingdom. He was no enemy to a reform obtained peaceably by a general concurrence; but he thought the present time highly improper, and decidedly inimical to such an attempt.*

MR. SHERIDAN begun with remarking, that a noble friend of his had stated, from a very poor authority, a circumstance of two persons agreeing to fight, to prevent a misunderstanding. He should have imagined the noble lord (North) would rather have considered that as a sort of Irish excuse for a duel, than as any serious matter of argument. When the motion should come forward, he trusted it would be met by argument and reason rather than by declamation and clamour, for that had been a day of clamour rather than a day of debate. He hoped there would be no radical dispute among those with whom he had the honour to act in general, or at least that their difference on a particular point would not be increased by the applause of the other side of the house. They who thought as he did, and had signed the paper in question, felt great anxiety in differing from their friends. They had not clamour to support them, and could find consolation only in the goodness of their cause. A noble lord (Carhampton), in terms neither very civil nor parliamentary, had doubted the sincerity of his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox) in what he had said in their favour. They wanted not the signature of his right hon. friend to assure them of his concurrence. They had his bond in the steadiness of his political principle and the integrity of his heart. An hon. gentleman (Mr. Powys) had called on all who thought as he did to protest against their object. It was wisely done; for to protest was much easier than to argue. When the day of discussion came, however, he hoped those who thought with the hon. gentleman would have more respect, if not for the society, for the country at large, than to think that protests without argument would be sufficient. No question, he knew, could be more unpopular in the house; he had not so bad a taste as to wish to speak upon it on that account; but he should think it base and contemptible to shrink from his opinion, because an unmeaning clamour was excited against it. There was, indeed, one description of people who would be still more clamorous against the members and the object of the association—all those



who wished the destruction of the constitution under the pretext of reform; and yet these were the men whom they were told they must act with. Far from it; the true allies of such men were those who opposed a necessary and a temperate reform; who, on whatever sophistical arguments, abandoned their former principles in support of it. Was it a light argument mentioned by the learned gentleman who supported the necessity of reform with so much ability, that sixty or seventy peers had been created or promoted by the present minister for public services, for no distinguished abilities, but merely for their interest in returning members of the house of commons? Here peerages had been bartered for election interest; in a neighbouring kingdom they had been all but proved to have been put up to auction for money. An hon. county member had gone so far as to charge the minister with making peers of men not fit to be his groom, and yet he was loud in the clamour against reform. The right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) formerly so zealous in the cause of reform, failing in his propositions for adding one hundred members to the house of commons, had added almost an equal number to the house of peers; in his public letter to the reverend Mr. Wyvill, he professed himself a friend, both as a man and a minister, to parliamentary reform, and pledged himself to pursue it till accomplished. What had since happened to change his opinion? He had been eight years a minister, and found he could do without it. They who thought reform at all times improper were consistent; but let them be careful of what alliance they formed against it. Let them be particularly on their guard against the right hon. gentleman who, while they leagued to oppose reform, was for ever watching an opportunity convenient for himself; the constitution had no enemy so dangerous as hypocrisy; those who clung to it with all its defects—no man so much to dread as he who kept his principles in reserve, to be acted upon as he saw expedient for his own ambition or popularity, who one day led on the powers of prerogative, and on another, was the wildest advocate of democracy. Mr. Sheridan declared he wished the question to be considered as no party question;—not a miserable scramble for places and power;—but to be taken upon its own merits as an important constitutional question. With respect to the unreasonableness of the time for bringing forward such a motion, he wished to know whether it was considered so on account of the prosperous

and tranquil state of the country, or on account of the increasing discontents of the people? Let it be branded with both; the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke), he supposed, wrote his pacifying pamphlet to quiet those discontents. One of the chief reasons that induced him to sign his name to the paper, was the seeing Mr. Walker's name to the Manchester resolutions. Mr. Walker, he said, was a very respectable individual, a man of sense, character, and opulence. Mr. T. Cooper, also, he had the pleasure to know. He took notice of a right hon. gentleman's (Mr. Burke) declaration, that he had been twenty-seven years in parliament, and during the whole of that period, excepting only about two years, had complained every year that they were violating some principles of the constitution, or infringing some privileges of the house; and then he supposed the right hon. gentleman said to the Buckinghamshire freeholders, "Oh, there was nothing in that, it was only our party way of talking; all the reform we want, is only to get into the places of the other gentlemen, and then things will go on well." With regard to what the right hon. gentleman had said of the correspondence between Mr. Cooper and the clubs at Paris, if he were furnished with the right hon. gentleman's speech during the American war, in answer to some charges of having corresponded with the Americans, no doubt he should have a very good excuse set up. Just as it answered the purpose for argument, the people were lowered or exalted; one gentleman had talked of their nourishing a young lion, and another of a storm. Those metaphors might be applied either way. If they were at sea in a ship, and were to see a storm rising, it would be more natural for a good seaman to say of the vessel, "there is a storm coming, let's examine the tackle, and see that her bottom is sound;" than to say, "the ship is going on her regular course; let her proceed, without any fears for her safety." Another gentleman had talked of the citadel. He would ask, was the citadel attacked? If it was threatened, was it not proper that they should repair to the ramparts and mount guard? With respect to the Russian war, the house, unfortunately for the hon. gentleman's argument, did nothing against the measure; but the people without doors disliked the war, and that compelled the right hon. chancellor of the exchequer to abandon his purpose.

*Major Hobart said, as the hon. gentleman had thought proper to allude par-*



ticularly to the Irish government, he begged leave to trouble the house with a few words on the subject. Peerages never were sold, he said, as had been clearly proved. With regard to the volunteer associations, many gentlemen of great respectability had entered into them; and when Ireland had gained her independence, she felt her consequence and her prosperity. But when a reform of parliament was in agitation, the volunteers were embodied in the capital to intimidate the house of commons, upon which all the respectable men left the corps and retired, parliament was dissolved, and reform was heard of no more. He said, with regard to the subject of that day's notice, it was a little extraordinary that the hon. gentleman should call upon those who objected to any motion to argue against it before any specific motion had been stated, or, he believed, even considered by the hon. gentlemen themselves.

Mr. Sheridan in explanation said, Mr. Grattan had publicly asserted in the house of commons in Dublin, that peerages were sold, and no satisfactory contradiction had been made.

DECEMBER 13. \*

ADDRESS ON THE KING'S SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF THE  
SESSION.

The session was this day opened. The speech from the throne declared, that his Majesty having judged it necessary to embody a part of the militia, had called the parliament together within the time limited for that purpose. It attributed these measures to seditious practices that had already been discovered, and a spirit of tumult and disorder that had shown itself in such acts of riot and insurrection as to require the interposition of a military force to support the civil magistrate. It continued to mention, that the industry employed to excite discontent on various pretexts, and in different parts of the kingdom, appeared to proceed from a design to attempt the destruction of our happy constitution, and the subversion of all order and government; and that this design had evidently been pursued in connection and concert with persons in foreign countries. His Majesty declared that he had observed a strict neutrality in the present war on the continent, and uniformly abstained from any interference with respect to the internal affairs of France; but that it was impossible for him to see, without the most serious uneasiness, the strong and increasing indications which appeared there of an intention to excite disturbances in other countries, to disregard the rights of neutral nations, and to pursue views of conquest and aggrandisement, as well as to adopt towards his allies, the States General, measures which are neither conformable to the laws of nations, nor to the positive stipulations of existing treaties. Under all these circumstances he felt it to be his indispensable duty to have recourse to those means of prevention and internal defence with which he was entrusted by law; and that he had also thought it right to take steps for making some augmentation of his naval and military force, being persuaded that these exertions were necessary in the present state of affairs, and are best calculated both to maintain internal tranquillity, and to render a firm and temperate conduct effectual for preserving the blessings of peace. In the conclusion of

*speech, his Majesty expressed the great pleasure he felt in mentioning the brilliant successes of the British arms in India, under the able conduct of Marquis Cornwallis, which had led to the termination of the war by an advantageous and honourable peace; and which, from their tendency, promised to secure the future tranquillity of the British dominions in that part of the world. After directing the attention of parliament to such measures as might appear necessary for the future government of those valuable possessions, and to secure the important advantages which might be derived from them to the commerce and revenue of this country, the speech concluded with recommending to parliament to adopt such measures as might be necessary under the present circumstances for enforcing obedience to the laws, and for repressing every attempt to disturb the peace and tranquillity of these kingdoms. "In endeavouring," added his Majesty, "to preserve and to transmit to posterity the inestimable blessings which, under the favour of Providence, you have yourselves experienced, you may be assured of my zealous and cordial co-operation; and our joint efforts will, I doubt not, be rendered completely effectual by the decided support of a free and loyal people." The address was moved by Sir James Sanderson, the Lord Mayor of London, and seconded by Mr. Wallace. Mr. Fox, after some general observations, and the usual apology of considering the king's speech as that of the ministers', declared it to be his firm opinion and belief, that everything asserted in the speech was false, and all its insinuations unfounded; that no insurrection existed; and that the alarm, whatever it might be, was not occasioned by any actual circumstances that could reasonably justify apprehensions, but by the artful designs and practices of ministers. He concluded his speech with an amendment to the address, which merely proposed, that the house should enter into an immediate examination of the facts which were stated in his Majesty's speech, as to the causes for assembling the parliament. The amendment was opposed by Mr. Windham, Mr. Dundas, Mr. Burke, Mr. Anstruther, the Attorney-General, Sir John Scott, the Solicitor-General, and Sir John Mitford; it was supported by Mr. Grey, Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Thomas Grenville, and Mr. Erskine.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that though what had been said by his hon. friend fully expressed his opinions, yet he could not prevail upon himself on the present occasion to be wholly silent. The hon. secretary (Mr. Dundas) had, in a manner, called upon every member that night to make his probation, to avow his political creed. He had stated as a great acquisition, the declarations which had been made on every side of attachment to the constitution. Till the proclamation was issued, that attachment had never been called in question. He believed that there never existed a constitution so dear to the generality of the people. So strong was his persuasion of this, that if a convention were nominated by the free vote of every man in the country, for the purpose of framing a government, he firmly believed they would express no other wish than for the constitution which had been



transmitted to us by the virtue of our ancestors, and would retain the form, the substance, and principles of that constitution. But he trusted that there existed in this country a firm set of men, who would not suffer the errors and abuses of that constitution to be held as sacred as the constitution itself. The imputation contained in the speech, and to which he regretted that an hon. friend of his had subscribed, he considered as highly unjust. It was the crown preferring a bill of indictment against the loyalty of the people. That bill was not a true one: if there were really any seditious persons in this country who wished to overturn the constitution, their numbers were as small as their designs were detestable. Ministers themselves had created the alarm, and it was the duty of that house, before they should proceed farther, to go into an inquiry respecting the circumstances which were alleged as the ground of that alarm.—Should they rely upon the information of ministry, or act in consequence of that information, when there was reason to think that they had themselves forged the plot? He hoped it was not understood that those who rejoiced at the revolution in France likewise approved of all the subsequent excesses. That indeed would be a very unfair mode of reasoning. The hon. secretary had read an address to the convention, signed by five thousand persons in this country, but which unfortunately had got only one name affixed to it. As to the other address which he had mentioned, the address from a society at Rochester, it appeared to be a clumsy joke upon the convention, as it afterwards turned out that no such society really existed. The formidable band of republicans who had been mentioned to exist in this country seemed to be men in buckram. The manner in which the addresses from this country had been received by the convention, certainly argued on their part bad dispositions, but was no proof of treacherous designs. But it had been said, would not the description of men who had been represented as entertaining seditious views, wish for a French army to be introduced into this country? Such was his idea of the character of Englishmen, that he should take upon him to assert, that were but one French soldier to land upon our coast upon the idea of affecting any change in our government, every hand and heart in the country would be roused by the indignity, and unite to oppose so insulting an attempt. Of the riot at Salisbury the hon.

tleman had been completely misinformed; no such riot had existed: and that at Dundee was soon quelled without calling out the military. But what had been done since the militia had been called out? Soldiers were brought into the vicinity of the metropolis, and the Tower fortified; and all this because there had been a riot at Dundee in Scotland. No such measure had been taken in Scotland when the riot had happened. As to the hon. gentleman's popularity, he was glad that he now prized it more than he had done last year; but he ought not to wonder that it had been diminished, when he reflected that Scotland had petitioned for six years in vain for a reform in parliament. He should take no other notice of his reflections on those whom he represented as having taken pains to deprive him of his popularity, than by saying, that if he wished to know who was that person who had deprived him of his popularity in Scotland, he should answer, it was Mr. Secretary Dundas himself.

As to the question of a war, he should vote that English minister to be impeached who should enter into a war for the purpose of re-establishing the former despotism in France, who should dare, in such a cause, to spend one guinea, or spill one drop of blood. A war at the present moment, he considered, ought only to be undertaken on the ground of the most inevitable necessity. He did not consider the opening of the Scheldt as a sufficient ground for war, nor did he believe that the Dutch would, on this account, apply to this country for its hostile interference, unless they had previously received instructions for the purpose.

*The house divided; for the address 290; for the amendment 50.*

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DECEMBER 14.

ADDRESS ON THE KING'S SPEECH.

*The lord mayor brought up the report of the address agreed upon the preceding night. It was read a first time. On the second reading, when the clerk came to a part of it containing a contingent probability of our being involved in a war, Mr. Fox rose, and after a long speech concluded by moving an amendment to the address—"Trusting that your Majesty will employ every species of negotiation to prevent the calamities of war that may be deemed consistent with the honour and dignity of the British nation."*

MR. SHERIDAN seconded the amendment, which, if adopted, would still, he believed, rescue the country from a war. Admi-



nistration had been uniformly ignorant of the affairs of France. If they had not been they might have prevented the present alarm, and have saved the life of the unfortunate King of France. Peace, if peace could be obtained, he wished for by all means. If it could not be obtained, he should vote for vigorous war, not a war of shifts and scraps, of timid operation or protracted effort, but a war conducted with such energy as shall evince to the world that the nation was fighting for its dearest and most invaluable privileges.

*The amendment was negatived.*

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DECEMBER 15.

MR. FOX'S MOTION FOR SENDING A MINISTER TO PARIS TO TREAT WITH THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF FRANCE.

MR. SHERIDAN began with observing that it had not been his intention to have said a word on the present question, and indeed he had been able to attend only a part of the debate; the substance of the motion had been discussed in the debate of yesterday, and his right hon. friend had given notice that he should make this motion merely to record on the journals his protest against the proceedings which the house was so weakly running into; and this he (Mr. Fox) had done at a time when he deprecated discussion; because, as the house knew, he had not a voice to defend his opinion. Gentlemen on the other side, however, had thought proper to raise their tone upon the confession of the inability of his right hon. friend to defend his arguments; and never since he had sat in parliament had he heard a question so perversely argued, or the mover of it so unjustly treated. This compelled him to trespass on the indulgence of the house, late as the hour was, and he must be excused for paying no respect whatever to the observation of a right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke), that it was improper to bring forward these discussions in the absence of his Majesty's first minister! This was a tender respect to the dignity of office in that right hon. gentleman; but he must be permitted to say, that the representation of the country was indeed placed in a degraded light, if it was to be maintained that the great council of the nation was not, in this momentous crisis, a competent court to discuss the dearest interests of the people, unless the presence of a certain minister of

the crown sanctioned their deliberations. But on what ground did they regret the absence of the treasury leader? Had there appeared any want of numbers or ability to compensate for this loss? What exertion that he could have furnished had been unsupplied? Had there been any want of splendid and sonorous declamation to cover a meagreness of argument? Any want of virulence of invective to supply the place of proof in accusation? Any want of inflammatory appeals to the passions where reason and judgment were unsafe to be resorted to? Unquestionably in all these respects, the chancellor of the exchequer had not been missed; in one article indeed they might be justified in regretting his absence. They had been pressed to prove the facts asserted in the king's speech and in the proclamation; not an atom of information could any present member of the government furnish; doubtless, therefore, the insurrection was a secret deposited in the breast of the chancellor of the exchequer; and he had taken in his pocket all the proofs of the plot to assist his election at Cambridge.

Mr. Sheridan then observed, that as he certainly should not follow the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) through the fury of his general invective, so neither could he pursue him in that vein of lightness and pleasantry, by which he had contrived to make the gravest hour this country ever saw, appear to be a moment of peculiar mirth and relaxation. He would confine himself to the question, which he thought lay in a very narrow compass. His hon. friend had recommended, that before we plunged into a war and drew upon the treasure and blood of the people of Great Britain, we should try, if possible, to settle the matter in dispute by negotiation, and show to the people that we had so tried. This his right hon. friend had recommended as a duty which we owed to our constituents, be the character and principles of the power with whom we are disputing what they may. Was it credible that a proposition of this nature should have been received with such heat? Reason and duty at any other time must have supported it. But the fact was that the moment was unfortunate; the time was full of heat and irritation; natural and artificial government had thought it their interest to inflame this indisposition. Intelligence was expected of a catastrophe in France, which all humane hearts deprecated and would equally deplore; in this temper therefore



the public mind was worked up to a blind and furious hostility against France ; and the dearest interests of our own country were to be risked at the call of a momentary enthusiasm which, if not bottomed in sound policy and sound sense, was sure not to be lasting. Could there be a stronger proof of this temper than the manner in which an hon. and learned member (Mr. Grant) had supported his argument ? The most successful passage in his able speech turned upon a passionate appeal to the pride and dignity of the English nation. He thought proper to assume that anything like negotiation at present, would be a petition for mercy and forbearance from the French nation : and then he triumphantly exclaimed, acknowledging the peculiar excellence of his argument, " Draw up your petition, and where is the man with a British heart within his bosom who will sign it ! " What unfairness is this ! said Mr. Sheridan ; and how can a man of his abilities stoop to a trick of argument which he must despise ? Petition ! ridiculous ! Was there no mode between nations of demanding explanation for an injury given or meditated but by petition ? Did we petition the court of Spain in the affairs of Nootka Sound ? Did we petition France in the dispute respecting this very Holland in 1787 ? Or did the learned gentleman believe that, notwithstanding these instances, there was something so peculiarly meek, pliant, and bending in the character of the first minister, that it was quite impossible for him to assume a lofty tone or a haughty air for any purpose ? The case of Russia, however, Mr. Sheridan ridiculed and excepted. To judge by that alone, he admitted that the learned gentleman might be justified in apprehending that every menace of this government was to end in an act of meanness ; that whenever he saw the minister in the attitude of threatening, he might expect to see him in the act of conceding ; and that if he armed, it was in order to petition for mercy. Without this inference from the past conduct of the administration, the general argument was idle, and all the proud acclamations it had produced were wholly thrown away.

Mr. Sheridan next adverted to the declaration of Mr. Windham, that as he was of opinion that moral propriety prohibited our treating or having any intercourse with France, he had rather, if it ever took place, that it should be matter of necessity, and not of choice. This Mr. Sheridan treated as a sentiment

not consistent with the usual precision of understanding which characterized that hon. gentleman. It was admitted that some time or other we must treat with the French, for eternal war, or the extirpation of the nation, was not yet avowed by any one. Necessity then was to be looked to, to give us a moral excuse, and whence was that necessity to arrive ? from defeat, from discomfiture, from shame and disgrace. Happy prospect to look to, which would excuse us, as it did the Duke of Saxe Teschen in his glorious retreat, from the contamination of treating with this nation of robbers and murderers, as they are styled. Happy, dignified opportunity, to treat when we should be completely at their mercy. Unquestionably we should then be justified, and certainly we should be undone : but the hon. gentleman argued as if this case of necessity through defeat, could alone justify us in negotiating with such a foe : what ! did he not perceive that an equal necessity might arise from our success ? We went to war for a specific object—the minister avowed and explained that object.

Admit that we are victorious and obtain it—is not the war to cease when the object of it is obtained ? And if to cease, how but by some intercourse or agreement of some sort or other ? Here there would be a situation in which negotiation must arise, not from necessity and defeat, but from victory and justice ; all nicety and strained morality and meek dignity, therefore, about the thing itself was trifling ; and as to waiting that time might operate, he did not conceive that if that time was to be spent in war and blows, much advance would be made in the spirit of conciliation. In stating the question this way, Mr. Sheridan said, he argued on the declared grounds which his Majesty's speech and the ministers gave for the war ; for if he were to argue on the ground on which the war was urged with such impassioned and popular eloquence by other gentlemen, in that case he must despair of ever seeing peace return to the earth. What then was the motive to keep faith with our allies ? Was the object to preserve Holland ? Or to resent the incendiary decree of the national convention ?—Nothing like it through all their speeches ; they scarcely deigned to mention such little and limited purposes. No—their declared object was to avenge all the outrages which have been committed in France, to reinstate, if possible, all that has been overthrown, to exterminate the



principles and the people who preach the principles which they reprobate. As Philip demanded the orators of Athens to be delivered up to him as his most formidable enemies, these gentlemen must have all the democratic metaphysicians of France extirpated, or they cannot sleep in their beds. In short, the whole bearing of the arguments and instigations they used to rouse the house to hostility, went to advise a war which never was to cease but in the total overthrow of the French republic, and the extermination of all who had supported it. Was the house, was the country ready to vote a war for such an object, and on such principles? We were told that we must not differ with the allied powers, with whom we were in future to co-operate. Were we then to make a common cause in the principles, and for the purposes for which these despots associated? Were the free and generous people of England ready to subscribe to the Duke of Brunswick's manifesto? that hateful outrage on the rights and feelings of human nature; that wretched tissue of impotent pride, folly and inhumanity; that proclamation which had steeled the heart and maddened the brain of all France; which had provoked those it had devoted to practise all the cruelties it had impotently threatened to inflict; which had sharpened the daggers of the assassins of the 2nd of September; which had whetted the axe now suspended over the unfortunate monarch;—was the nation ready to subscribe to this absurd and detestable rhapsody? An hon. officer (Sir James Murray) had attempted to defend his performance,—but how? By denying that it intended what it professed and threatened. From a British officer of his character and understanding, a different defence might be expected; the hon. baronet had given instances where the conduct of the Prussian army contradicted the spirit of their manifesto;—what instances on the contrary side might be adduced he would not then discuss. One case alone had been sufficient to decide him as to the true spirit of the league—the brutal rigour with which La Fayette had been treated: whatever else he was, he was a brave man, and he was in their power. The use they had made of that power sufficiently showed how they would have treated others, whom they might well consider as entitled to ten-fold enmity. The worthy baronet, concluded Mr. Sheridan, thinks they never meant to carry their proclamation into execution; I thank God they never had the opportu-

nity. He proceeded to reprobate the idea of Great Britain engaging in the war on the principles of the allies; and yet how difficult was it to co-operate in their efforts, yet disconnect their motives and their ends! This was a serious consideration for parliament. The question was not merely whether we should go to war or not, but on what principles, to what end, and pledged to what confederacy we should go to war. For his part he had declared, and he hoped with sufficient frankness and fairness, that, the single consideration in his mind would be—whether war must be the defence of the country and its constitution! And for that purpose he would support the executive government, in whatever hands his Majesty placed it. But in this declaration he referred to a war undertaken on the necessity, and directed to the objects stated by his Majesty and his ministers. He did not refer to the crusade of chastisement and vengeance which the zeal of some gentlemen recommended, and the clamour of the house seemed so ready to adopt. He would never consent that one English guinea should be spent, or one drop of British blood be shed, to restore the ancient despotism of France—the bitterest foe that England ever knew. Sooner than support such objects, or such a project, he would rather violate the proud feelings which he shared in common with the house, and petition for peace, with any concession, and almost by any sacrifice; but he trusted no such dilemma impended. The real object of the war was one thing—the fiery declaration which was to whet our valour was another. Mr. Sheridan now adverted to the strange situation in which the house might bring itself, by indulging and encouraging this furious spirit of declamation against the meanness and infamy of holding any sort of treaty and intercourse with France. It was, in the first place, a libel on his Majesty's speech and upon our own address. His Majesty had encouraged us to hope, that notwithstanding his armament, he might yet procure to us the blessing of peace; and we have thanked and encouraged him in his gracious intention. How was this to be achieved—disputes and cause of complaint existing—without some sort of communication?—it was impossible. How was this to be carried on—was there any sort of dumb crambo by which the parties might come to understand each other, and yet the form of negotiation be slipped from, and the moral dignity of Great Britain be preserved?



A right hon. gentleman, indeed (Mr. Burke), had warned the house to be tender of advising his Majesty in the exercise of his prerogative ; yet he himself had actually usurped the first prerogative of the crown, and, in contradiction to the king's express declaration, declared the nation to be actually at war ; but what was to be said if, after all this, the minister, when returning to his seat in the house, should bring us the happy intelligence that, in consequence of explanation and treaty, the calamities of war were actually averted ! Mr. Sheridan asserted peremptorily, that at the very moment in which the house was urged to a flame at the idea of our stooping to the contamination of treating with France, the minister was actually negotiating, not only through Holland, but directly with agents from the French executive council. Should his efforts be successful, observe how you must treat him on his return : if he should tell you that a temperate explanation has taken place ; that the French had abandoned all idea of attacking our ally ; that they have rescinded the incendiary decrees and declarations which had countenanced the disaffected in England, and that this peaceful and prosperous country might return to that state of applauded neutrality which we have just thanked his Majesty for adhering to, this we must answer, "go, thou mean wretch, thou betrayer of the pride and dignity of the crown and of the nation ; thou contaminated man, debased by intercourse with the agents of robbers, ruffians, murderers, and atheists—we only dissembled when we applauded your neutrality, we detest your peace, and we meant to dupe our sovereign when we called on him to preserve it." Would the house make this answer, should such happy intelligence be brought them, and will they own that they played the hypocrite in their address to their king ? Mr. Sheridan next took notice of the argument of the inutility of any negotiation, the French having ordered Dumourier to open the Scheldt. He stated the dates, by which it appeared that that order was given before our declaration, that we would support the States-General, could have been known in Paris. Why had no representation been made to France on that subject ? A similar circumstance had occurred in 1785, when the emperor seized the Scheldt. The determination of the French to support the Dutch, their then ally, was subsequently made known to him ; negotiation ensued, and he abandoned his project. Lastly, Mr. Sheridan stated the various grounds on which he thought if war

must be the event, that preparations should be instant and vigorous. He then took notice of the sneer of an hon. gentleman, when he asked whether his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox) would be the ambassador to Paris? He declared, that from the commencement of the revolution, he had been of opinion that if there had been a statesman-like administration, they would have considered the post of minister at Paris as the situation which demanded the first and ablest talents of the country. Happy, he believed, it would have been for both countries, and for human nature itself, if such had been the opinion of government in this country; and highly as he valued his right hon. friend, unparalelled as he thought his talents were, he should not have hesitated to have declared that, as minister in Paris, there was scope and interest for the greatest mind that ever warmed a human bosom. The French had been uniformly partial, and even prejudiced in favour of the English. What manly sense, what generous feeling communicating with them might have done, and above all, what fair truth and plain dealing might have effected, he believed it was not easy to calculate; but the withholding all these from that nation in our hollow neutrality, he was sure, was an error which would be for ever to be lamented. He concluded with a reference to Lord Sheffield's declaration, that he was ashamed of the enthusiasm that he had once felt for Mr. Fox. This declaration he treated with the indignant zeal which friendship demanded. The according chorus of the noble band who, in spite of the efforts of clamour and power have surrounded the standard of the champion of the constitution, testified how little they valued the desertion of this noble lord.

*The motion was negatived.*

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DECEMBER 20.

SUPPLY.

*Mr. Hobart brought up the report from the committee of supply, granting 25,000 seamen, including marines, for the service of the present year.*

MR. SHERIDAN observed, that there were now about to be voted 9000 men more than we had for the service of the last year. He did not rise to oppose that vote—although, if it were only for a decent respect hitherto uniformly paid to the representatives of the people, something like explanation ought to have



been given—but to express his hearty concurrence, because, he believed, the general aspect of foreign affairs, and the necessity of guarding against foreign enemies, required the augmentation. He would even have voted a greater number of seamen had the minister proposed it ; because, though he deprecated war, yet—should that hateful necessity arrive—he was decidedly of opinion that, being once engaged in it, and contemplating the objects with which our enemy would undoubtedly pursue it, it became this nation at once to provide, as far as human prudence and effort could provide, that the war, if at all events we were to have a war, should not be a languishing and protracted war, or ineffectual to the end for which it was undertaken. If such were to be the event, he had no doubt but that government would receive the unanimous support of the house to every proposition tending to give vigour and effect to the operations of war ; yet he earnestly hoped that it was still a practicable measure to preserve peace. It was under that impression the house were now voting this armament. After all he had heard in former debates, he could not but congratulate the house and his country on the prospect of peace, in which the present vote authorised him to indulge. It proved, at least, that those who had proscribed peace, who had peremptorily declared the country to be actually at war, were not very confidentially admitted into the minister's secrets, any more than they appeared to have very judiciously consulted the true interests of their country.—“I repeat again,” said Mr. Sheridan, “peace, if it be possible, consistently with the honour and safety of the nation ; but if war, an united and instant exertion of the whole energies of the nation, and an unanimous support of the executive government in calling forth those efforts for the defence of our country and constitution.”

*Here Mr. Burke rose and interrupted Mr. Sheridan, conceiving he had finished. After explanation Mr. Burke apologized, and Mr. Sheridan proceeded.*

He said he had certainly concluded all he meant to say directly on the question ; but there was another point which he was confident it was in order to introduce, upon which, seeing the minister, for the first time, in his place, he had wished to repeat his opinion. He was convinced, notwithstanding the gross and indiscriminate abuse thrown out against every human creature bearing the name of Frenchmen, that there existed in that country a sincere disposition to listen to and respect the opinion

of the British nation. He alluded to the situation of the king now on his trial, and of his family. He was confident that the French nation was ill informed of the temper and feelings of the free, but generous and humane, people of Great Britain, and that if they could be in any authentic manner apprised of what he in his soul and conscience believed to be the genuine impression of the public mind on the subject, namely, that there was not one man of any description or party who did not deprecate, and who would not deplore, the fate of those persecuted and unfortunate victims; should the apprehended catastrophe take place, he was confident that such a conviction might produce a considerable influence, he wished he could venture to say a successful effect, on the public mind in Paris, and throughout France. Mr. Sheridan pressed shortly his reasons for thinking thus, and said that among those whose hearts would be most revolted and disgusted by the unjust and inhuman act of cruelty he alluded to, he believed would be found all those who had been foremost in rejoicing at the destruction of the old despotism of France, and who had eagerly hoped and expected that, to whatever extremes as to principles of government a momentary enthusiasm might lead a people new to the light of liberty, that, however wild their theories might be, yet there would have appeared in the quiet, deliberate acts of their conduct those inseparable characteristics of real liberty, and of true valour, justice, magnanimity, and mercy. He would not take upon him to give any opinion as to the manner in which the public sentiment of England might be expressed on this subject, but he was more and more convinced, from the latest intelligence from France, that the opportunity ought not to be neglected.

*Mr. Burke reprobated the words justice, magnanimity, and mercy, as applied to France. He observed, that the hon. gentleman who spoke last had, in some degree, reproached the house for not being in the secret of the cabinet. What he probably did know he was not bound to know, what was the disposition of the French ministers; nor was he (Mr. Burke) bound to know that of the English. The hon. gentleman had, in one part of his speech, recommended vigorous exertion if a war was to take place; and again, he said, in another place, he was glad to find the armament was so small, as proved there were still hopes of peace. These two sentiments did not appear to him to tally very well. He then came to the question, and said, he should have given his vote heartily for 40,000 men, if that number had been proposed; but he would not say anything against the minister, as he must best know the number that would be wanted, and therefore he should give his vote for what was now proposed. His opinion was, that the dis-*



*position of the French people was dangerous to Europe. He knew nothing of the gentlemen of the phalanx, he should leave them to themselves; but as to the French, he must again repeat, he could not rely, as the hon. gentleman who spoke last desired, on the justice, the magnanimity, or the mercy of the French, particularly when they charged their king as a criminal for offences, for which that house would not call the meanest individual in the country to their bar to answer. The truth was, the king was in the custody of assassins who were both his accusers and his judges, and his destruction was inevitable. He then returned to the question, and observed, that if the number had been 40,000 instead of 25,000, he should have given him his vote more cheerfully.*

Mr. Sheridan rose and claimed the indulgence of the house beyond the usual bounds of explanation. So perverse a misrepresentation of any member's speech, accompanied by such unwarrantable insinuations had, perhaps, never been heard in that house. He would not attribute it to any ill purpose, or any ill motive, for he believed the right hon. member's ill temper had so run away with him, that he scarcely knew himself what he meant, or what he had said.

Mr. Sheridan, after explaining on other points, concluded with exculpating himself particularly from one accusation of Mr. Burke. He denied his having arraigned the vote of the majority on Thursday, as being untrue to their trust; for he maintained, that he did not believe there were two members in the house who had voted on the grounds, or the arguments, upon which he (Mr. Burke) had recommended the war; or rather, on which he had declared the war was actually begun. The minister and the majority had consented to a war of necessity and defence, the object of which was ascertained; the hon. gentleman had insisted on a volunteer crusade of vengeance, of which no man could see the end.

*The resolutions were read and agreed to.*

ADDRESS.

*Mr. Pitt stated some difficulties which he feared would occur in debating the address.*

Mr. Sheridan was rejoiced to see Mr. Pitt so readily adopt the general idea. He recommended, however, the utmost caution and nicety in the manner of executing it; if our object was only a general protest for the sake of posterity, as seemed to be the right hon. gentleman's principal motive, perhaps it mattered little how it was worded; but as he was actuated by a sincere hope that some actual good might result to the living objects of our com-

mon apprehension, he conceived the manner of touching the subject required the most temperate and acute attention ; to do any good we must look sincerely to our purpose and suppress our passions ; every thing like menace or insult to the people whose minds we wished to influence must be avoided ; it was a delicate subject, but when the question came he would speak out and without reserve.

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DECEMBER 31.

ALIEN BILL.

MR. SHERIDAN proposed to exempt ladies from the restrictions of the bill ; which, he said, would not defeat the object of it, and would show that the age of chivalry was not gone in this country, whatever might have become of it any where else.

*The amendment was negatived.*

Mr. Sheridan, supported by Mr. Baker, proposed to exempt all who were resident in the kingdom before January, 1792, as the suspicions on which the bill was founded were said to extend only those who had come into the kingdom since that period.

*To this it was answered, that aliens who had resided in the kingdom for some time, were the persons with whom aliens, coming into the kingdom with evil designs, would most naturally connect themselves.*

*The report was received, and ordered to be taken into consideration on the following day.*

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JANUARY 4, 1793.

ROYAL BURGHS OF SCOTLAND.

MR. SHERIDAN gave notice that, immediately after the recess, he would make a motion relative to the reform of the royal burghs of Scotland. As the subject was of a most serious nature, he wished Mr. Dundas to give as much attention to it as possible during the holidays.

*Mr. Pitt wished to know how soon after the recess the motion would be made.*

Mr. Sheridan replied, within a week certainly.

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JANUARY 31.

HIS MAJESTY'S MESSAGE.

*Mr. Pitt moved, "that the consideration of his Majesty's message should be adjourned till to-morrow." Mr. Grey moved an amendment to insert "Monday," instead of the word "to-morrow."*

MR. SHERIDAN allowed that there was one point in which all



agreed, that no measures ought to be adopted without mature and deep consideration. That to-morrow would allow sufficient time for such consideration, he felt very much inclined to doubt. Mr. Pitt, however, had not answered those observations made by Mr. Grey with respect to the necessity of further information; and, indeed, from a cursory view of those documents laid before the house, he conceived they contradicted what were asserted to be notorious facts. The question which the house had a right to ask was, whether the papers in the possession of the members justified the possible case of a war? Indeed it could not be denied that a complete and ample communication of every particular ought to be given to the country, in order to convince the people, if a war should take place, that such a calamity could not be averted. With respect to the chasm stated by Mr. Grey, it was rather extraordinary that notice had been taken, in Mr. Brissot's report, of the amicable communication that had existed between the executive council of France and this country at the very period in which the chasm occurred. Another material circumstance was, that the house was totally in the dark with respect to the opening of the Scheldt.

*Mr. Grey's amendment was negatived; the original motion was consequently carried.*

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FEBRUARY 1.

SEDITION.

MR. SHERIDAN rose to give notice of a motion on a subject to which he meant to call the attention of the house on Friday next; namely, the sedition and seditious practices at present existing in this kingdom, and what ought to be the conduct of the house on that subject.

MOTION BY MR. GREY, FOR PAPERS RECEIVED FROM AGENTS OF  
THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT.

Mr. Sheridan observed that when the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) said he had avoided going into a discussion on the contents of the papers, he meant to insinuate that his hon. friend (Mr. Grey) had gone into collateral matters, not necessarily connected with arguments, merely for the production of papers; but the insinuation was unfounded, for his hon. friend had not uttered a single sentence which was not closely connected with the object

of his motions. The right hon. gentleman's refusal yesterday to say as much as he did that day, or to give any answer or explanation at all, could be ascribed only to ministerial arrogance. It was, however, some consolation to his hon. friend that he was not the only person to whom the right hon. gentleman was so insultingly reserved; for it would appear he had concealed even from his colleague (Mr. Secretary Dundas) the circumstances of the conferences which he this day allowed he had had with an unauthorized agent of France; for that right hon. colleague had on a former day declared, in language astonishingly perspicuous, "That he did not believe it was compatible with his belief that anything more had passed between the French government and his Majesty's ministers than what passed through the hands of Mons. Chauvelin."

## FEBRUARY 11.

## EXPORTATION OF GRAIN TO FRANCE.

*Major Maitland moved, "That there be laid before the house copies of all orders given on the part of our government, for stopping the exportation of grain to France since the month of October, 1792."*

*Mr. Pitt said, that if the hon. gentleman thought he could prove that what had been done by his Majesty's ministers towards France fairly provoked the aggression against this country, he might bring the subject forward; but he submitted to the house whether this was the time for that purpose; and he submitted also to the hon. gentleman, whether he thought that, after the house had received a message from his Majesty, it was fair to ask it to come to a conclusion against a fact stated in that message, before the house should take the message itself into consideration. If the hon. gentleman could prove anything that would lead the house to a conclusion that there had not been such an aggression, the day on which the message was to be debated would be the proper one for that purpose, and the house would have the advantage then of hearing the arguments of the hon. gentleman; but surely the house could not now proceed to the consideration of a point which belonged so immediately to the message from the throne, and the discussion to which that would lead when under the consideration of that house.*

MR. SHERIDAN said the right hon. gentleman did not seem to comprehend what the object was which his hon. friend had in view by his motion; he now called upon the house to allege anything or to come to any conclusion; it had for its object only the ascertaining of a fact previous to the discussion of his Majesty's message; and which would be material in that discussion either one way or the other. If they were told that no ships had



been stopped, as had been alleged, they would be satisfied; because there would be an end of that part of the question. But surely the minister could not call on the house to vote for an address, or to vote anything, without information on the subject. He did not know what sort of an address the minister intended to propose to-morrow, but the probability was that it would be what addresses in general are, a mere echo of the speech: if so, the house would be called upon to declare that there has been an unprovoked aggression on the part of the French towards this country, and that they have, on groundless pretences, taken measures of hostility against us. How was the house to know all this unless the necessary previous information was granted? There had been a rumour that a treaty had been concluded between the Emperor of Germany and this country; this was a material point to the discussion of the subject to which the attention of the house was to be called; and, therefore, he desired to know whether that was true, in order that he might be the more able to form an opinion for himself whether these pretences, which were called groundless, were, in fair reasoning, to be deemed groundless—surely the house would not pronounce them so before they had evidence of any kind upon the subject. If the minister said “there is no such treaty,” he should be satisfied upon that point. If there was a treaty, then he would say that the house, before they voted the pretences of the French groundless, should see that treaty. It was said the French had proceeded against us without the smallest provocation. Now this could never be known by the house unless they were fairly informed whether the ships alluded to by his hon. friend had or had not been stopped under the circumstances he had mentioned; if the ships had not been stopped, he should think himself bound to vote for that part of the address; but if they had no evidence, they should not surely be so servile as to vote for what they had had no means of ascertaining to be true; he should, for these reasons, hope that the ministers would reconsider the matter and give some information to the house.

*The motion was afterwards withdrawn.*

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FEBRUARY 12.

ADDRESS ON THE WAR WITH FRANCE.

*Mr. Pitt moved that an humble address be presented to his Majesty, to return his Majesty the thanks of this house for his most gracious message, informing us,*

*that the assembly now exercising the powers of government in France have, without previous notice, directed acts of hostility to be committed against the persons and property of his Majesty's subjects, in breach of the law of nations, and of the most positive stipulations of treaty; and have since, on the most groundless pretences, actually declared war against his Majesty and the united provinces. To assure his Majesty that, under the circumstances of this wanton and unprovoked aggression, we most gratefully acknowledge his Majesty's care and vigilance in taking the necessary steps for maintaining the honour of his crown, and vindicating the rights of his people; that his Majesty may rely on the firm and effectual support of the representatives of a brave and loyal people, in the prosecution of a just and necessary war, and in endeavouring, under the blessing of Providence, to oppose an effectual barrier to the further progress of a system which strikes at the security and peace of all independent nations, and is pursued in open defiance of every principle of moderation, good faith, humanity, and justice.*

*That in a cause of such general concern, it must afford us great satisfaction to learn that his Majesty has every reason to hope for the cordial co-operation of those powers who are united with his Majesty by the ties of alliance, or who feel an interest in preventing the extension of anarchy and confusion, and in contributing to the security and tranquillity of Europe.*

*That we are persuaded, that whatever his Majesty's faithful subjects must consider as most dear and sacred, the stability of our happy constitution, the security and honour of his Majesty's crown, and the preservation of our laws, our liberty, and our religion, are all involved in the issue of the present contest; and that our zeal and exertions shall be proportionate to the importance of the conjuncture, and to the magnitude and value of the objects for which we have to contend.*

*Mr. Fox moved an amendment to the following purport:—*

*"We learn with the utmost concern, that the assembly who now exercise the powers of government in France have directed the commission of acts of hostility against the persons and property of your Majesty's subjects, and that they have since actually declared war against your Majesty and the united provinces; we humbly beg leave to assure your Majesty, that your Majesty's faithful commons will exert themselves with the utmost zeal in the maintenance of the honour of your Majesty's crown, the vindication of the rights of your people, and nothing shall be wanting on their part that can contribute to that firm and effectual support which your Majesty has so much reason to expect from a brave and loyal people, in repelling every hostile attempt against this country, and in such other exertions as may be necessary to induce France to consent to such terms of pacification as may be consistent with the honour of your Majesty's crown, the security of your allies, and the interests of your people."*

MR. SHERIDAN began with saying that, in one circumstance alone in the present debate, he felt himself actuated by feelings and motives similar to those professed by the hon. member (Mr. Burke). The hon. gentleman had declared that he did not speak to support the minister, for his case had been so perfectly made



out by himself that it needed no support ; but that he rose solely to repel the insinuations and charges of his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox), so he could sincerely declare that he had no thoughts of attempting to give additional weight to the arguments by which his right hon. friend had, in his judgment, refuted those of the minister. He was provoked to rise solely by the insinuations and charges of the last speaker against his right hon. friend. Never had he before indulged himself in such a latitude of ungoverned bitterness and spleen towards the man he still, occasionally, professed so much to respect. His ridicule of the smallness of the number of friends left to the object of his persecution ill became him of all mankind ; but, he trusted, that however small that number was, there ever would be found among them men not afraid, upon such a subject, to oppose truth and temper to passion and declamation, however eloquently urged, or however clamorously applauded.

They were styled by the hon. gentleman a phalanx, and he styled the amendment of his right hon. friend a stratagem to keep this phalanx together, who had been otherwise, it seems, endeavouring to make up for the smallness of their numbers by the contrariety of their opinions ; an odd description of a phalanx ; no, he would never have given them that appellation if he had not known the contrary of this to be the truth. He knew well their title to the character he had given them, and that a phalanx, whatever its extent, must consist of a united band, acting in a body, animated by one soul, and pursuing its object with identity of spirit and unity of effort. His right hon. friend's purpose then, in this amendment, must have been as he had stated it himself, to reconcile those differences of opinion in other quarters to which he had expressly alluded, and not those which existed no where but in the imagination of the man who, he believed, had at least exhausted all power of splitting or dividing farther. But what suggested to him it must be a stratagem of his right hon. friend's ? Was he a man prone to stratagems ? At any other time he would trust to his candour even for an answer—for if ever there was a man who disdained stratagems by nature, who knew how to distinguish between craft and wisdom, between crookedness and policy, who loved the straight path, and sometimes even without looking to the end, because it was straight, it was the very person whom he now arraigns for craft and trick.

The next object of his sarcasm was, his right hon. friend's complaining of being so often misrepresented—"Pity," says the hon. member, "that a gentleman who expresses himself so clearly, and who repeats so much, should be so liable to be misapprehended." A pity, certainly, but not much to be wondered at, when misapprehension was wilful and misrepresentation useful. The hon. member had only mistaken his own facility in perverting, for his antagonist's difficulty in explaining. But another grievance was, that, however misunderstood in that house, these same speeches were detailed with great distinctness and care in the public prints, while those of a right hon. friend near him (Mr. Windham) were, as he declared, perfectly mangled and misrepresented. There was no stratagem to be sure in this insinuation, but was there much candour in it? Did any one living know better than he who made the insinuation, that nothing could exceed the carelessness of his hon. friend (Mr. Fox) to the representation of his speeches out of doors? He believed he had never seen, touched, revised, or printed a single line he had spoken in parliament during his life, or even caused it to be done for him. If either friends or judicious editors were the more attentive to the task, he thought they did credit to themselves and an important service to the public at large: not less candid was it to insinuate a purposed misrepresentation of another member's (Mr. Windham) speeches. He claimed as long and as intimate a friendship with that gentleman as the right hon. member who appeared so tremblingly alive for his fame; he thought equally high of him in many respects; but he must in the frankness of friendship take the liberty of saying, that though no man had more information to ground argument upon, more wit to adorn that argument, or logic to support it, yet that faculty, which had rather been sneered at in his right hon. friend, namely, that of rendering himself perfectly perspicuous and intelligible to every capacity, was not the distinguished characteristic of that gentleman's eloquence. He was apt sometimes to spin a little too fine; and, therefore, it was possible, without any corrupt partiality on the part of the reporters of the debates, that his right hon. friend's (Mr. Fox) speeches might be given with a superior degree of perspicuity.

He now proceeded to discuss Mr. Burke's other attacks on Mr. Fox; he was charged with a dereliction of principle in having



that day omitted to express his apprehension of the increase of French power; be the French government what it may, certainly Mr. Fox had not said one word upon that subject in his speech that day, but had he not, in every one of his previous speeches in this session, distinctly and most forcibly avowed and urged his sentiments on that head? How pleasant to observe a gentleman, who begins his speech with taunting his right hon. friend for repeating things too often, reproach him in the next sentence for avoiding a repetition the most unnecessary he could have fallen into! But if the reproach was on that ground extraordinary, it was still more extraordinary that the general observation itself should come from the quarter from which it proceeded! A dread of France it seemed ought to be a fundamental principle in the mind of a British statesman; no alteration in her government can change this principle or ought to suspend this apprehension, and who was the gentleman so tenacious of this creed? The only man in all England who had held the directly contrary doctrine; had he, or could we have forgot that, in his very first contemptuous revilings at their revolution, only in the last session of parliament, he had expressly scorned and insulted them as a nation extinguished for ever, and to be feared no more; and, all in consequence of the change in her government, that he described the country as a gap and chasm in Europe. Their principles had done more, said he, than a thousand fields like Blenheim or Ramilies could have effected against them; had they even got power by their crimes, like the usurpation of Cromwell, he could have respected or feared them at least, but they were blotted out of the European map of power for ever! And the historian had only to record "*Gallos olim bello floriussse*"—yet this very gentleman, said Mr. Sheridan, having last year expressed all this with as much heat as he had this year expressed the contrary sentiment, arraigns my right hon. friend for having omitted to re-echo for a single hour his unalterable apprehensions of the power of France, be the changes of its government what they may.

It was still more curious to observe the manner of attempting to charge this circumstance on his right hon. friend. A book was produced, and he was proceeding to read a former speech of his (Mr. Fox's), as if he had ever once retracted his opinion on this subject. When the speaker called him to order, the hon. gentleman did not seem to take the interruption kindly, though cer-

tainly he ought to have been grateful for it ; for never, sure, was there a man who had a greater interest in discouraging the practice of contrasting the past and present speeches, principles, and professions of any public man. Was the hon. gentleman ready to invite such a discussion respecting himself ? If he were, and his consistency could be matter of regular question in that house, he did not scruple to assert that there was scarcely an *iota* of his new principles to which there was not a recorded contradiction in his former professions. Let a set of his works be produced, one member might read, paragraph by paragraph, his present doctrines, and another should refute every syllable of them out of the preceding ones ; it was a consolation to those who differed from his new principles to know where to resort for the best antidote to them.

His next accusation against the mover of the amendment was, that he should have put the question on so mean an issue as whether the actual hostile overt-acts committed by France had been sufficiently explained and disowned to this country. This it seemed was contemptible : it was a war against the principles of the French government we were to engage in, and not on account of their petty aggressions against us ; and, therefore, it followed that it was to be a war to exterminate either them or their principles. The doctrine he thought both wild and detestable ; but, admitting that it was right, the hon. gentleman must yet extend his scorn and his rebuke to the minister as well as to Mr. Fox ; for though they differed in their conclusion, they had discussed the grounds of the war precisely on the same principle and footing. The hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) differed equally from both, or more rather from the minister, with respect to the professed motives and objects of the war than from those who opposed the war. In this view he thought it most unmanly and unwarranted in the minister to sit still and listen to these inflammatory rants, and even to cheer the war song of this hon. gentleman,

— quo non præstantior ullus,

*Ære ciere viros martemque accendere cantu.*—VIRG.

when at the same moment he knew, and had even just declared, that the war was undertaken upon principles, and for purposes diametrically opposite to those upon which he suffered the house to be heated and misled by a spirit of vengeance and Quixotism which it was his duty to oppose and restrain.



With the same persevering purpose of inflaming and misleading, the hon. gentleman had read so much from the cruel and unjust proceedings against the late unfortunate monarch, and from various other French publications. This habit of picking out all the hot, wrong-headed, and disgusting things said or written by individuals in France, would never be so constantly resorted to for a fair purpose. The compilation on this principle, avowed by the treasury, and so often quoted by the hon. member, was an unworthy expedient, particularly as it had been done at a time when we still professed our hope and desire for peace. What if a conduct like this had been pursued in France? If, when the convention came to deliberate on war and peace, and to decide on the provocations alleged to have been given by our government, pamphlets had been given to the members at the door of the convention, containing extracts from all the various speeches of that right hon. gentleman since the first revolution—containing, in appearance, every thing that the scorn of pride, the frenzy of passion, and the bitterness of malice could have urged against them, from the very outset, and assuming the applause of his hearers to be the will of the government, and to speak the voice of the people?—if to these had been added every furious and indecent paragraph that had appeared in our publications, and especially in prints connected with administration, what would have been our opinion of such a proceeding at such a time? And what our indignation, if we learned that this had not been a work hatched in the dens and caverns of savage murderers and foes to peace; but that it had been produced under the direction of the executive council itself, and at the very moment that they were professing their desire of avoiding hostilities with us, and of promoting a good understanding? The hon. member would have been among the first to have quoted such a conduct in them as a new proof of mean hypocrisy and determined malice.

The address and toasts of an idle dinner of English and others, at White's, in Paris, was the next subject of the hon. member's alarm and invective. And to aggravate the horror of this meeting, the house was assured, that at it were drank the healths of Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan. The insinuation was scarcely worth noticing, nor should he have adverted to it, but just to show how well entitled the hon. gentleman was to the credit he claimed for the accuracy of his facts and information. This anecdote wanted

only one little ingredient to produce possibly some effect, namely, fact. The truth was, that neither his nor Mr. Fox's health were drank at that meeting ; and it was a little unlucky that the hon. gentleman, who ransacked every corner of every French paper for anything that would make for his purpose, should have overlooked a formal contradiction of such toasts having been given, inserted by authority in the *Patrioté François* ; and it was the more unlucky, as the purpose of bringing forward this important anecdote was evidently to insinuate that they were, in Paris at least, considered as republicans ; while the actual reason given for not drinking their healths was, that, though friends to the reform of abuses, they were considered as expressly against all idea of revolution in England, and known to be attached to the form of the existing constitution.

The next specimen of the hon. member's extreme nicety with respect to facts, was the manner in which he proved the enormous ambition of France, by the convention's having adopted a proposition of the minister of justice (Danton), that the future boundaries should be the Rhine, the Alps, the Pyrenees, and the ocean ; and great stress was laid upon this proposal having been made by a person of such rank in the state. Now for the fact—Danton was not the minister of justice, and the proposition was not adopted by the convention. The right hon. gentleman might have recollected that if Danton had been minister of justice, he could not have been a member of the convention ; and he ought also to have known that the proposition, so far from having been adopted, was scarcely attended to. But the ambition of France, and her aggressions against this country, were not, according to the hon. member, the only causes of war. Religion demanded that we should avenge her cause. Atheism was avowed and professed in France. As an argument to the feelings and passions of men, Mr. Sheridan said, that the hon. member had great advantages in dwelling on this topic ; because it was a subject upon which those who disliked every thing that had the air of cant and profession on the one hand, or of indifference on the other, found it awkward to meddle with. Establishments, tests, and matters of that nature, were proper objects of political discussion in that house ; but not general charges of Deism or Atheism, as pressed to their consideration by the hon. gentleman ; thus far he would say, and it



was an opinion he had never changed or concealed, that although no man can command his conviction, he had ever considered a deliberate disposition to make proselytes in infidelity as an unaccountable depravity of heart. Whoever attempted to pluck the belief or the prejudice on this subject—style it which he would—from the bosom of one man, woman, or child, committed a brutal outrage, the motive for which he had never been able to trace or conceive. But on what ground was all this infidelity and atheism to be laid to the account of the revolution? The philosophers had corrupted and perverted the minds of the people; but when did the precepts or perversions of philosophy ever begin their effect on the root of the tree, and afterwards rise to the towering branches? Were the common and ignorant people ever the first disciples of philosophy, and did they make proselytes of the higher and more enlightened orders? He contended that the general atheism of France was, in the first place, no honour to the exertions of the higher orders of the clergy against the philosophers; and, in the next place, that it was notorious that all the men and women of rank and fashion in France, including possibly all the present emigrant nobility, whose piety the hon. gentleman seemed to contrast with republican infidelity, were the genuine and zealous followers of Voltaire and Rousseau; and if the lower orders had been afterwards perverted, it was by their precept and example. The atheism, therefore, of the new system, as opposed to the piety of the old, was one of the weakest arguments he had yet heard in favour of this mad political and religious crusade.

Mr. Sheridan now adverted to Mr. Burke's regret, that we had not already formed an alliance with the emperor, and to Mr. Dundas's declaration, that he hoped that we should ally with every power of Europe against the French; this appeared to him to contradict Mr. Pitt's declaration, and it was the most unpleasant intelligence that he had heard that day. If we made such alliances, our principles and our purposes would soon become the same; we took the field against the excesses and licentiousness of liberty, they against liberty itself. The effect of a real co-operation would be a more fatal revolution than even prejudice could paint that of France—a revolution in the political morals of England, and in consequence, the downfall of that freedom which was the true foundation of the power, the prosperity,

and the glory of the British nation. Sooner than entwine ourselves in such alliances, and pledge the treasure and blood of the country to such purposes, he had almost said, he had rather see England fight France single-handed. He feared the enemy less than our allies. He disliked the cause of war, but abhorred the company we were to fight in still more. He had a claim to call on the right hon. gentleman to join him in these principles: who were these allies, and what had been their conduct? Had he (Mr. Burke) forgot his character of the Polish revolution?—"That glorious event had bettered the condition of every man there, from the prince to the peasant, and had rescued millions, not from political slavery, but from actual chains, and even personal bondage."—Who had marred this lovely prospect, and massacred the fairest offspring of virtue, truth, and valour? Who had hypocritically first approved the revolution and its purposes, and had now marched troops to stifle the groans of those who dared even to murmur at its destruction? These allies, these chosen associates and bosom counsellors in the future efforts of this deluded nation. Could the right hon. gentleman palliate these things? No. But had he ever arraigned them? Why had he never come to brandish in that house a Russian dagger, red in the heart's blood of the free constitution of Poland? No; not a word, not a sigh, not an ejaculation for the destruction of all he had held up to the world as a model for reverence and imitation! In his heart is a record of brass for every error and excess of liberty, but on his tongue is a sponge to blot out the foulest crimes and blackest treacheries of despotism.

Mr. Sheridan next argued on an observation of an hon. member (Mr. Percy Wyndham), who had said that we refused to make any allowance for the novelty of the situation in which France stood after the destruction of its old arbitrary government. This Mr. Sheridan pressed very forcibly; insisting that it was a mean and narrow way of viewing the subject, to ascribe the various outrages in France to any other cause than this unalterable truth, that a despotic government degrades and depraves human nature, and renders its subjects, on the first recovery of their rights, unfit for the exercise of them. But was the inference to be, that those who had been long slaves ought therefore to remain so for ever, because, in the first wildness and strangeness of liberty they would probably dash their broken chains almost to



the present injury of themselves, and of all those who were near them? No; the lesson ought to be a tenfold horror of the despotism which had so profaned and changed the nature of social men; and a more jealous apprehension of withholding rights and liberty from our fellow-creatures; because, in so doing, we risked and became responsible for the bitter consequences: for, after all, no precautions of fraud or of craft can suppress or alter this eternal truth, that liberty is the birth-right of man, and whatever oppose his possession is a sacrilegious usurpation. Mr. Sheridan concluded with adverting to the evident intention of the minister to render unanimity impossible, but said he should never retract his former declaration, that the war once entered into, he should look to nothing but the defence of the country and its interests, and therefore give it a sincere and steady support.

*Mr. Fox's amendment was negatived, and the address carried without a division.*

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FEBRUARY 18.

MR. FOX'S RESOLUTIONS AGAINST THE WAR WITH FRANCE.

*Mr. Fox moved the following resolutions:—*

*"That it is not for the honour or interest of Great Britain to make war upon France on account of the internal circumstances of that country, for the purpose either of suppressing or punishing any opinions and principles, however pernicious in their tendency, which may prevail there, or of establishing among the French people any particular form of government.*

*"That the particular complaints which have been stated against the conduct of the French government are not of a nature to justify war in the first instance, without having attempted to obtain redress by negotiation;*

*"That it appears to this house, that in the late negotiation between his Majesty's ministers and the agents of the French government, the said ministers did not take such measures as were likely to procure redress, without a rupture, for the grievances of which they complained; and particularly that they never stated distinctly to the French government any terms and conditions, the accession to which on the part of France would induce his Majesty to persevere in a system of neutrality;*

*"That it does not appear that the security of Europe and the rights of independent nations, which have been stated as grounds of war against France, have been attended to by his Majesty's ministers in the case of Poland, in the invasion of which unhappy country, both in the last year and more recently, the most open contempt of the law of nations, and the most unjustifiable spirit of aggrandizement has been manifested, without having produced, as far as appears to this house, any remonstrance from his Majesty's ministers;*

and the glory of the British nation. Sooner than entwine ourselves in such alliances, and pledge the treasure and blood of the country to such purposes, he had almost said, he had rather see England fight France single-handed. He feared the enemy less than our allies. He disliked the cause of war, but abhorred the company we were to fight in still more. He had a claim to call on the right hon. gentleman to join him in these principles: who were these allies, and what had been their conduct? Had he (Mr. Burke) forgot his character of the Polish revolution?—"That glorious event had bettered the condition of every man there, from the prince to the peasant, and had rescued millions, not from political slavery, but from actual chains, and even personal bondage."—Who had marred this lovely prospect, and massacred the fairest offspring of virtue, truth, and valour? Who had hypocritically first approved the revolution and its purposes, and had now marched troops to stifle the groans of those who dared even to murmur at its destruction? These allies, these chosen associates and bosom counsellors in the future efforts of this deluded nation. Could the right hon. gentleman palliate these things? No. But had he ever arraigned them? Why had he never come to brandish in that house a Russian dagger, red in the heart's blood of the free constitution of Poland? No; not a word, not a sigh, not an ejaculation for the destruction of all he had held up to the world as a model for reverence and imitation! In his heart is a record of brass for every error and excess of liberty, but on his tongue is a sponge to blot out the foulest crimes and blackest treacheries of despotism.

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seem to have the same ideas of virtual representation he had professed and published formerly. Having got on the subject of scraps, he would treat the gentleman who opposed bringing up the petition, with another scrap. On a former occasion, referring to the borough of Old Sarum, it had been said that its streets were now only to be distinguished by the different colours of the corn that grew on the soil which it once occupied; and that its only manufacture was the manufacture of members of parliament. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth, a publication was laid before the crown lawyers as treason; they answered, it was not treason, but felony, for its contents were all stolen from other publications. Just so it was with the petition; its contents were all stolen from the declarations and speeches by which the chancellor of the exchequer had originally courted popularity. It was hard, indeed, if expressions that had been applauded, when spoken in the house of commons, were to be deemed inadmissible when adopted by the constituents of the house of commons. He referred to the strong language of the petition of the city of London, on the famous case of the Middlesex election, and said, that his Majesty's present minister had given the model of associations for parliamentary reform, as it could make no difference whether resolutions were dated from the Thatched House, or from the Freemasons' Tavern; and concluded with supporting the petition's being brought up.

*The house divided; for receiving the petition 21; against it 109.*

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FEBRUARY 25.

SEDITION.

MR. SHERIDAN reminded the house that some time ago he had given notice of his intention to make a motion on the subject of the sedition or seditious practices said to have been then existing in this country. Since that time, he observed, several circumstances had occurred which had induced him to postpone his motion from day to day. Since the date of this notice war had actually broken out, and it did not appear to him proper to interrupt the important debates upon that great question, by the introduction of any other of comparatively less importance. But this had not been his only motive for delay; several prosecutions had been commenced on account of the seditious practices to which his motion was to refer; and he had been of opinion, that



pending these prosecutions, he ought not to bring forward any proposition on the subject. At present, these causes of delay either no longer existed, or were on the point of being removed; the house had definitively decided upon the question of war; and as to the prosecutions, many of them had been brought to a conclusion, and the remainder, he presumed, would be disposed of in the course of the present week; he therefore thought that he might now, without farther delay, fix the day on which he meant to make his motion: he gave notice, therefore, that he would make it on Monday next. He begged leave beforehand to request that gentlemen would come prepared to discuss with temper the question which he should propose; and he was confident that if they would display as much temper on the occasion as he should, there could be little doubt but they would agree with him in the conclusions which he should draw from the facts and arguments which he should state to them on that day.

*Mr. Dundas rose merely to mention that he himself had fixed upon Monday next, and had communicated his intention on that subject to many members, for taking into consideration the report of the resolutions which he should have the honour to move this evening in the committee on the state of the East-India Company. He hoped, therefore, the hon. gentleman would leave him in possession of Monday, and that any other day would equally serve his (Mr. Sheridan's) purpose.*

Mr. Sheridan replied, that he understood the right hon. gentleman had fixed upon Friday next for the report of the resolutions respecting the East India Company; and this it was which had made him (Mr. Sheridan) make choice of Monday. However, as any other day would answer his purpose just as well, he was willing to leave the right hon. gentleman in possession of that day, and he himself would take the day after.

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MARCH 4.

MR. SHERIDAN'S MOTION RELATIVE TO THE EXISTENCE OF  
SEDITIONOUS PRACTICES IN THIS COUNTRY.

*After the private business, the order of the day for taking Mr. Sheridan's motion into consideration was called for and that gentleman was not present. An adjournment was moved, but Mr. Sheridan soon after entering the house the order of the day was read.*

MR. SHERIDAN said he begged a thousand pardons for having kept the house waiting so long; but he understood that the house

were to be occupied in receiving excuses from members for absence on the day of call, and that the business would not be over until after six o'clock. He had been stopped, too, on his way by upwards of fifty petitions, which had been put into his hands, from the royal burghs of Scotland, respecting their internal government, and he should beg leave to present them to-morrow, and he hoped for the attendance of the house, and particularly that of the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) who had such a share in the former discussions upon that subject. He should now proceed to the subject of the motion which he intended presently to submit to the house, the object of which would be to appoint a committee to inquire into the truth of the reports of sedition in this country — reports, whatever some might think of them, he was sure were calamitous in their effects to this country, and might become more so, if not checked in time. He should not attempt to prove, in this place, that there never existed any sufficient reason for apprehending the danger of the sedition, or that there had not been any act of insurrection in any part of the kingdom to warrant the propagation of such reports; it was well known that there never was anything of that sort of consequence enough to merit the description which had been given of it, or to create the alarm which followed; at least that was the opinion he had formed upon the subject. However, he perhaps might be obliged to retract that opinion in consequence of the proofs that might be brought forward before the committee of inquiry for which he intended to move; if that should happen to be the case, he should be glad to see that ministers had only done their duty in spreading an alarm at a time of real danger, and should be glad to praise them for their vigilance, however he might deplore the necessity that gave it birth. When he said he should move for a committee to inquire into those things, he did not wish to say anything upon the effect of such inquiry at present; his object was to know in what situation this country really was, and also to know whether the language made use of by his Majesty's ministers upon the subject of sedition, conspiracy, and treason, was not at least premature at the time it was uttered, and consequently, that nothing had happened in this country that could justify government in the steps they had taken and the proceedings they instituted; at present, however, he had the satisfaction, as he really believed the house had, of thinking that



these reports were ill-founded: to remove all doubt, however, upon that subject, and to obtain complete information, were the objects of his motion. Parliament met early in December last, and they were called together in a very extraordinary manner; this of itself was matter of alarm to the country; for they naturally concluded that it would not have been so assembled had there not been strong reasons for it. We were then under the apprehension of a foreign war. From that very moment parliament seemed so taken up with that object, that they lost all curiosity with respect to the internal situation of this country: they took it for granted that everything was true that was said by ministers upon the subject of sedition lurking in the country at the beginning of the session: they took it for granted, too, that every step taken to check it was just: this was a fraud upon the public, and the house ought to feel it so, for he really and in his conscience believed, that the alarm was spread for the express purpose of diverting the attention of the public for a while, and afterwards leading them the more easily into a war. He must now beg leave to observe upon the nature of the confidence which that house should place in the assertion of the king's ministers at any time, more especially when they were about to involve the country in the calamities of war, and of the effect of extending that confidence. When ministers came to that house and called upon it to strengthen the hands of government, they were always bound to explain to that house the real motives they had for asking that assistance, in order that the house of commons, as the representatives of the people, might be able to tell that people whose lives and money were to be expended, the reason why they were to be deprived of the rights they had before enjoyed; for he would maintain it as a maxim, that to strengthen the hands of government it was necessary, for a time, to weaken the rights of the people; and he would follow that observation up, that to strengthen the hands of government in carrying on a foreign war, without informing the people of the real state of our country, was making mere machines of them, was a conspiracy against the constitution, and was laying down a plan by which their liberty might be lost for ever.

With respect to the late supposed sedition in this kingdom, and of that supposed temper for insurrection, and of the lurking treason of which we heard so much by hints and conjectures, there

were three circumstances to be considered, and three points of view in which the subject might be placed. The first was, that the danger in this country had been real: secondly, that the danger was not real, but that the whole was a false alarm really entertained by government, the effect of a delusion successfully practised upon them; in which case the propagation, on their part, although unfortunate, was yet honest. The third was, that the whole was founded on a systematic plan laid by government for deluding the sense, and finally subduing the spirit of the people. It was, in his opinion, the duty of parliament to regard the subject in either of these three points of view; but he could not perceive any other in which it could be properly regarded; and he saw in all of them no way of proceeding with propriety but by instituting a committee of inquiry. Let us suppose, for instance, the whole evil was really felt as ministers had described at the beginning of the session. What then would follow? Most certainly the adoption of a committee of inquiry, in order that a plan should be laid for our future safety. What was the next thing to be attended to, and the next view of the subject, supposing that ministers really apprehended danger, although in truth there had not existed any? Most certainly that a committee should be appointed to inquire, and that they might make their report upon the situation of the country, announce it to be in a state of safety, and calm the apprehensions of the public. In the third point of view, that supposing the whole to be a mere device on the part of government for the purpose of leading the people more easily to a war with France, by persuading them that there are at this moment many agents in France who are doing everything they can to disturb the peace and internal tranquillity of this country; again he must say, that a committee should be appointed to inquire, in order that the public should know the deception which had been practised on them, and that if the war had been so commenced, the people should be enabled to employ the means of declaring to the throne their sentiments upon that subject.

Mr. Sheridan observed, that we were at war with a great, a powerful, and hitherto victorious republic—it was idle to conceal the truth—and he added that there was not in that house, or in this country, any man who wished more sincerely than he did that we might be able to check them in their career; at the



same time he certainly characterized them aright at present. He then came to the accounts which had been given, or rather the hints which had been thrown out by his Majesty's attorney-general at the beginning of the present session of parliament, concerning the plots and conspiracies that were said to be formed in this country; but had anything of this been proved? Not a syllable. But this made part of the system adopted by government; and the public were to be alarmed at the apprehension of the progress of French principles, in order that they might the more readily be induced to go to war with the French; and, by the conduct of the worthy gentlemen of the associations, the people of this country were called upon to revile the French in expressions, and to follow their system in practice, namely, to establish a government by clubs. He wished the house to reflect on what was likely to be the result of all this. The people of this country were accused of a spirit of disaffection; many plots and conspiracies were said to be hatching; and he, in his conscience, believed there was not an iota of truth in any part of the charge to justify the apprehension which government expressed at the commencement of the session. What was to be done? Institute a committee of inquiry; for if there was any of this treason or conspiracy lurking any where, all he could say was, that it remained at this hour as undiscovered as at the first moment when it was apprehended to be formed. These associations were formed, as it was said, for the protection of persons and property against republicans and levellers; and what were they about to do, and what in fact had they been doing? First of all, they had been employed to prevent the circulation of Mr. Paine's book and the "Jockey Club," and to bring to punishment the vendors of those publications—works which had for many months been spread all over the country by the connivance, as he might say, of his Majesty's ministers, and this too when one of those very ministers had an opportunity of reflecting on the impropriety of such publications, who had himself formerly indulged a disposition not to treat the high powers of this country with that respect which was due, and had, no doubt, repented of that temper and thoroughly changed his sentiments. "What care I for the king's birth-day—what is the king's birth-day to me?" or some such coarse expression had, he believed, been uttered by a noble duke some time since. What, he asked, had appeared of late to justify our dread-

ful apprehensions? He was not sure that ministers felt any alarm at the time that they were endeavouring to alarm the country; for how did the chancellor of the exchequer act? In the course of the summer he proceeded with due solemnity to take the weight on himself of the laborious office of warden of the Cinque Ports, and he had conducted himself in that situation in a manner equally pleasing to his hosts and to his guests, and returned to town without any great apprehension of danger; but as the meeting of parliament approached, things became more and more alarming, until at last the whole country was said to be threatened with destruction. The whole of this was a panic created by ministers for the purpose to which he had alluded before; this he felt no difficulty in saying, and he called on ministers to deny it: he was so well convinced of the truth of it that he would venture to affirm, that if all the magistrates appointed under the new police bill were to appear at the bar of that house, they would not be able to give one instance of the existence of that sedition which ministers had so often adverted to in calling upon the house to support them. All he requested of the house was, that a committee of inquiry should be appointed; or of ministers, if they said that such a committee was unnecessary, to confess that they themselves had been deceived upon the subject, and that what they advanced upon that topic some time since, they were now ready to retract. This, he said, was due to the public; for the people of this country ought not to be practised upon by fraud; they were a generous and a brave people; and he believed that if this country were to be invaded by a foreign enemy, it would only increase our energy and stimulate our exertion. He must therefore say that, to accuse them of seditious motives, was highly unjust as well as indecent. This panic had already had a great effect; and, indeed, it was much too general an impression to proceed from real danger; a general panic was always created by phantoms and imaginary evils. It had been always so in the panics of armies; for instance, he believed that there was not once to be found in history an instance in which the panic of an army had proceeded from real danger; it always proceeded either from accident or some stratagem of the enemy. Indeed the thing bore evidence for itself; had the danger been real, there must have been a difference of opinion as to the amount of it; for while there was a difference in the size and character of the understandings of men,



there must be a difference in their opinions; but those who believed anything upon the tales of sedition, which he had before alluded to, believed every thing that was said about it, and that of itself proved its fallacy. There were numerous instances recorded, both in prose and verse, where nations had been misled and had acted upon such false alarms. There were many instances in which a panic had been communicated by one class of men to the other.

————— Sic quisque pavendo  
 Dat vires famæ: nulloque auctore malorum  
 Quæ finxere, timent. Nec solum vulgus inani  
 Percussum terrore pavet: Sed curia, et ipsi  
 Sedibus exiluiere patres, invisaque belli  
 Consulibus fugiens mandat decreta senatus.

His friend (Mr. Wyndham) had been panic-struck, and now strengthened the hand of government, who, last session, agreeable to a vulgar adage, "Rolled his Majesty's ministers in the dirt." At that period he pulled off the mask of perfidy, and declaimed loudly against that implicit confidence which some had argued ought to be placed in ministers. He now thought such arguments were impolitic, and no man was more strenuous for that confidence which he had before with so much warmth reprobated. Another friend (Mr. Burke), to whose doctrines Mr. Wyndham had become a convert, had also been panic-struck. He had been so affected that he saw nothing but a black and clouded sky; a bleak opposition, where there was not a shrub or bush to shelter him from the gloomy aspect of public affairs; but he had taken refuge in the ministerial gaberdine, where he hoped for security from the approaching storm.

He had now dismissed the two first parts of the subject, and he therefore came to the question whether ministers had spread those alarms for purposes which they did not avow? It would be with great reluctance that he should put that construction upon their conduct; but there had been such encouragement given to reports of a certain nature, that he hardly knew how to avoid saying that these alarms were created for very dangerous purposes; indeed he could not refrain from saying that there appeared on the part of his Majesty's ministers, first, a desire to inflame the minds of the people to prepare them to go to war with France; secondly, an inclination to divert the public mind from the question of parliamentary reform, for the purpose of concealing the

apostacy of certain individuals who do not choose to be put to the test, and tried by the public upon the standard of their own professions. As to the first of these points, namely, that of inflaming the minds of the people of this country, in order to prepare them for a war with France, Mr. Sheridan said he need only refer to the speech of the right hon. gentleman himself (Mr. Pitt), who had said, at an early stage of the discussion of that subject, that he believed the public rather reproached government for supineness than blamed it for its promptitude in going to war. This was a mode of bespeaking the opinion of the public; and he could not help saying it appeared to him, from that and other things, that attempts were made, and some of them, he was sorry to say, successful ones, to inflame the public mind with regard to France. He was surprised to hear it said by one hon. gentleman in that house, that the only consolation that could arise from the death or murder of the late unfortunate Louis, that it would rouse the indignation and animosity of mankind against France. This was a consolation arising from inhumanity that he did not envy; he knew there were those who did not mourn that unhappy event. There were those who did not interest themselves to avert that misfortune. But those who loved freedom, or cherished liberty, must ever deplore the transaction, because by one act they had armed despotism, and given a fatal blow to the general interests of mankind. Such was his opinion now, and such it always had been upon that subject.

With regard to the other motive of ministers, namely, that of diverting the attention of the public from the question of parliamentary reform, he believed in his conscience that there was a design of that nature entertained by ministers in this country which had succeeded for a time; but all this was temporary, for the people were not to be deluded for ever. God forbid they should! God forbid that a brave nation should be blinded for a long time by a few individuals; and that a whole country should be false to itself, and destitute of honour, because an individual or two had betrayed their character, and because a few persons were interested in propagating false alarms. That was not to be expected; indeed the deception was too coarse in its nature to last for much length of time; and the reports were too ridiculous about plots, conspiracies, and treasons, to be long credited. How stood facts upon this occasion? A noble duke (Richmond) had for-



merly been of opinion that there was nothing to be seen but danger for want of a parliamentary reform ; but he had so elevated himself of late upon fortifications of his own creating, and availed himself of his great power of discernment, that he was now able to discover plots, conspiracies, and treasons under the garb of a parliamentary reform, or under any reform. The alarm had been brought forward in great pomp and form on Saturday morning. At night all the mail coaches were stopped ; the Duke of Richmond stationed himself, among other curiosities, at the Tower ; a great municipal officer too had made a discovery exceedingly beneficial to the people of this country—he meant the Lord Mayor of London, who had discovered that, at the King's Arms, in Cornhill, was a debating society where principles of the most dangerous tendency were propagated ; where people went to buy treason at sixpence a-head ; and where it was retailed to them by the glimmering of an inch of candle, and five minutes, to be measured by the glass, were allowed to each traitor to perform his part in overturning the state. And yet, coarse and ridiculous as they were, these things had their effect with the public for a time, and certainly did create a general impression of fear. Here Mr. Sheridan entered into a detail of many circumstances and stories founded upon false alarms in several parts of the kingdom : first, when the alarm began, carts, waggons, and coaches were said to arrive daily and hourly at the Tower filled with traitors from different parts of the island, and ministers were applauded for their prudence and activity in the service of the state. Not one word of truth in the whole case ! Not a being brought to the Tower—not a being charged with treason ! The whole was a miserable fabrication to deceive the credulous. Suspicion, indeed, had been entertained, and he believed that many letters had been stopped at the post-office, and he had no doubt that many of his were among the number ; he said he did not wish to talk of himself, but as so much had been said upon the subject of correspondence with foreign powers, and as hints were thrown out in various channels, under the direction and encouragement of ministers, that he, and others with whom he agreed on public subjects, held improper correspondence with other powers, he trusted the house would excuse him for adverting to himself, and saying, that if government should think it worth their while, he should not, on his own part, have the smallest objection to pub-

lishing every word in every letter he ever wrote upon the subject of politics. This he did to refute at once all the calumny which had been spread upon that subject. He had not the least doubt but that he might safely say the same thing of others who had been slandered in the same way. There was a paper drawn up by him, which he had no difficulty in saying he should be glad to avow everywhere and on any occasion; and this he said in order that it might be understood that no apprehension or misconstruction should deter him from saying he wished it to be published; he was confident it was not repugnant to the principles of justice and humanity. This related to the subject of the trial of the late King of France. He said this in hopes of defeating the purposes of those who were so malicious as to insinuate, from the most unworthy motives, that there existed a faction in this country connected with its enemies. He could have wished that there should not have been any necessity for his declaring that he abhorred the principle of the decree of the National Convention of France of the 19th of November. Nothing should have deterred him from having written his sentiments upon such subjects. Nothing, he hoped, would deter ministers from publishing them at some future day, as there was no doubt but they had kept copies of them, and various other letters, at the post office.

He then came to take notice of the manner in which government had proceeded to create the alarm to which he had alluded. They had advertised Mr. John Frost and Captain Perry. The public were to look upon these two gentlemen as traitors. One hundred pounds each was to be given for apprehending them. One of them (Mr. Frost) was at this hour in this country under bail, and ready for his trial, if he is to be tried; and the other was charged only with having printed in the *Argus* what the chancellor of the exchequer had himself delivered in a speech upon the subject of parliamentary reform. He said, he should not have mentioned these things, but to prove that great pains had been taken to carry on a system of delusion. There was another fact which was too extraordinary to be omitted. A story had been trumped up that there was a plan for taking the Tower by the French; after which the whole of our constitution was to be overturned, and the royal family were to be murdered. At the head of this plot was to be placed that most execrable character, Marat, whom the French would have done well long



ago to have removed, and which they would have been able to accomplish had they not joined to him Robespierre, and others of a different character. This fiction was not enough; for we are told that there were certain people in pay by the French, for the purpose of destroying as many of the people of this country as they could, and that attempts had been made to poison the New River. There was no doubt but that these things appeared now to be too ridiculous to be believed; and yet many gave credit to them, insomuch that the proprietors of the New River were obliged to advertise in all the newspapers the falsehood of that report. Was this no hardship? or did it not show a shameful disposition to impose upon the public, and to work up the people of this country into fury against the French? In farther confirmation of this, he referred the house to the gross, clumsy calumny of the various newspapers which were published from day to day, under the authority of administration, where every thing that had any relation to the French was abused without mercy: by this the French were given to understand for many months, that our court was at enmity with them. This also was part of the system of delusion which had been practised, in order to bring about a rupture between the two countries. There was one paper in particular, said to be the property of members of that house, and published and conducted under their immediate direction, which had for its motto a garbled part of a beautiful sentence, when it might with much more propriety have assumed the whole—

———— Solem quis dicere falsum

Audeat? Ille etiam cæcos instare tumultus

Sæpe monet, fraudemque et operta tumescere bella.

But it was upon the authority of government alone that he rested, when he made these observations. An insurrection was said to be planned by corrupting the soldiers, and this turned out to be the sum of sixpence given for porter in Edinburgh: now what the scarcity of money might be in that country he could not tell; but this was very clear, that the system of corruption had not been carried to any very great extent. He then alluded to the burning of Mr. Dundas in effigy by the people of Scotland, to which circumstance he imputed the soreness that the right hon. gentleman had displayed in the account he had given of the pretended insurrection in that country. It was said

that Rotundo, a very notorious ruffian from France, had been in England, and no doubt for execrable purposes; but he was not sent here on a sanguinary embassy; but fled merely to elude the hand of justice. There were other stories afloat at the same period equally ridiculous, and ramified into various rumours. It was said that numbers were kept in pay; that they were drilled and disciplined in dark rooms by a serjeant in a brown coat; and that on a certain signal being given, they would sally forth from porter rooms and back parlours, and finally subvert the constitution. Such were the idle stories with which for months the people have been amused. There was another circumstance which struck a panic into government, the planting the tree of liberty in Dundee. But this was like

“Birnam wood coming to Dunsinane.”

This insurrection, as it was called, originated with a few school-boys, the chastisement of whom by the master, restored them to their loyalty, and prevented them from overturning the constitution. Some persons, through a motive of indefensible humour, had written a letter to Sir G. Yonge, informing him of an insurrection at Salisbury, when no such insurrection really existed. It was likewise said there was an insurrection at Shields. The military were instantly dispatched; but the insurrection had ceased, and the seditious insurgents were voluntarily assisting in getting off a king's ship that had run on ground. He next instanced what had been deemed a seditious tumult at Yarmouth, which was equally well-founded as what he had before noticed. If Mr. Pitt was not so stiff-necked and lofty—if he condescended to mix in public meetings, he would not be apt to be led into those errors which were practised, he must suppose with too much success, on his credulity. In all the various accounts of pretended insurrections, he maintained that there was not the least proof of discontent in the public mind, or disaffection to government in any one of these, but that the whole arose from other causes. These things entitled him to say, that there was ground for inquiry into the subject, and that an inquiry ought to take place to set the public mind at rest upon such topics. He then touched upon the addresses transmitted from patriots in pot-houses to the national convention, a long list of which had been compiled under the auspices of the treasury. One of them was signed by Mr. Hardy, an honest shoe-maker, who little



dreamt, God help him, how near he had been overturning the constitution.

He next took notice of the effect of the system of delusion in the metropolis, and the hardships under which many individuals laboured in consequence of that system; where publicans had been told by different magistrates of the effect of their allowing any conversation upon politics in their houses; that if they conducted themselves in the least degree displeasing to the court, they should lose their licenses; and still farther, they were asked, what papers they took in. "Do you take in the *Morning Chronicle* or *Post*?"—"Yes, Sir."—"Take care there is no sedition in it; for if there is, you are liable to punishment for distributing it to your customers." There was one very particular case in this respect. At the Unicorn, in Covent Garden, a society had long met to discuss the propriety of a parliamentary reform. The landlord was sent for to Sir Sampson Wright; the man appeared, and explained the nature of the society. Sir Sampson Wright said, it was a perfectly harmless meeting in itself, but advised him not to suffer the society to meet again, because it might give offence to the higher powers. So that a man was not to have a newspaper which he liked, or which his customers might be desirous of seeing; nor was a harmless society to be held, because it might be disagreeable to the higher powers. He was given to understand also, that everything that had passed in his house for months was perfectly known to the magistrates, as well as that of every other public house, for they had agents employed for this purpose.

He then took notice of the expression of the attorney-general at the opening of the session of parliament of his having 200 cases to bring forward for prosecution, only a very few of whom had been at all brought forward, and many of those only booksellers for selling the "*Rights of Man*," omitting all the parts objected to by the attorney-general in the trial of Mr. Paine, and for selling Mr. Paine's "*Address to the Addressers*," and the "*Jockey Club*." Mr. Sheridan said he had 200 cases to submit to the attorney-general, and to that house, of real hardship sustained by innocent individuals, and which he should have stated this night, but that the accidental and unexpected diligence of the lords had called for so much of his time last week on the trial of Mr. Hastings, as not to allow him to collect these

cases, but which might be hereafter attended to and discussed in that house. Many of them arose out of the spirit of the alien bill—a bill in its nature oppressive, the exercise of which must soon incapacitate for ever any man from being a proper minister of a free country. It was impossible that ministers could know the proper objects in all cases to be sent away; and if they did not know of any such, they became constrained to send some away to save appearances, and to keep themselves in countenance. This reflection led him to take notice of the practice of erecting barracks all over this kingdom, also part of the same system, and tending, with all their other measures, uniformly to the point of despotism.

The next point which came to be noticed was, the mode adopted on the part of the Treasury, to discover persons who distribute seditious books. This was done by means of a circular letter all over the country, from Messrs. Chamberlaine and White, solicitors to the treasury, to various attornies, employing them as agents in this business. This, Mr. Sheridan said, was to the last degree dangerous, because it went to the effect of placing in a situation to be tempted, a set of men not very highly distinguished for superior morality, and of causing them to derive emolument from the litigation, which themselves, not their clients, were to create. Many attornies, he said, had, to their honour, rejected the offer with scorn and indignation. The books chiefly to be noticed were, as he had said before, the works of Mr. Paine and the "Jockey Club;" he had no occasion to say anything of these books; but neither these, nor any other books, could launch out more freely on the necessity of a parliamentary reform, than the speeches of Mr. Chancellor Pitt and the Duke of Richmond, or more grossly against kings, than the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) upon former occasions. To prove this, he read passages from the noble duke's address to the county of Sussex, and to Colonel Sharman and the volunteers of Ireland, in which he asserted, that it was in vain for the people to look to the house of commons for redress; that they could find it only in themselves; that they ought to assert their right, and not to desist till they should have established a house of commons truly representing every man in the kingdom. From Mr. Burke's speech on his motion for leave to bring in his bill of reform, he read a passage, calculated to represent the peers of the realm in the most ab-



ject, degraded state. He was sorry that the report was not made to the king in council, of the conviction of persons charged with misdemeanors; if it were usual to make such a report, he should like very much to hear the observations of his Majesty's ministers on the cases of some of the wretched bill-stickers convicted of publishing seditious libels. When the seditious passages were read, the noble duke might say, "he borrowed that from the preamble to my reform bill." The right hon. gentleman might say, "that expression was stolen from the speech which I made when I proposed to the house of commons my plan for a parliamentary reform." Mr. Sheridan said, he wondered how these personages could bear their own feelings, when they knew that some poor wretches were lying upon straw, in the gloom of a prison, for having published sentiments which they had solemnly professed in and out of parliament. The offence was the same in all, but mark the difference of the treatment; punishment and a prison were the lot of the one set, whilst the others were honoured with places and emoluments, and seats in his Majesty's council.

He then took notice of the principles of the society of which Mr. Reeves was the leader, and of all others formed upon that plan. These societies were described by Mr. Law, in the letter which he published on the 24th of January last, in the *Morning Chronicle*, stating his reasons for withdrawing from that society; and stating, amongst other things, that they proceeded against republicans and levellers upon private anonymous letters; nothing, he said, could be more infamous than such a principle.

He took notice of a sermon preached before the house of lords, by a learned prelate, in which his lordship complained of the folly with which people had of late suffered themselves to be carried away by a spirit of discussion about the origin of government. The slavishness of this high-church doctrine, which discountenanced inquiry, could, Mr. Sheridan said, be equalled only by the want of charity which appeared in another part of the sermon, in which the public indignation was directed against a particular description of men (protestant dissenters) who were represented as unworthy of the name of fellow-christians. He touched upon a publication of Dr. Tatham, in which he accuses Dr. Priestley as an accomplice in the murder of the King of France, and told him, that whatever pretension he might have to reputation for abilities, he must give up his heart, which could

in no light whatever be defended. Here Mr. Sheridan took notice of the disgraceful riots at Birmingham, and of the difficulties thrown in the way of payment of the money ordered by verdicts of juries upon trials for the damages sustained by these riots. But even this was exceeded by what had taken place in Cambridge, for, to such a pitch of insolent injustice had the system of political oppression been carried against publicans, that they were compelled to take an oath that they not only would not suffer political disputes in their houses, but that they would give an account of the behaviour and conversation of every republican they might happen to know or hear of. All this was infamous, but it was the effect of the panic he had so frequently alluded to; it was owing to that panic that the chancellor of the exchequer objected the other day to the bringing up and receiving of the petition from the inhabitants of Nottingham, stating the necessity of a parliamentary reform—a petition not half so objectionable as the Chester petition which had been received. It was owing to that panic that a right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) did not of late speak with the eloquence with which he used to command the admiration of his auditors: for now, really, the taste of his mind, and the character of his understanding was altered. It was owing to that panic that another right hon. gentleman (Mr. Wyndham) had brought his mind to approve what his heart had for years before abhorred; he meant the erection of barracks. It was owing to that panic that that right hon. gentleman had prevailed upon himself to support a minister because he had a bad opinion of him. It was owing to that panic that a noble and learned lord (Loughborough) in the other house had given his disinterested support to government, and had actually accepted of the seals of an administration he had uniformly reprobated from its commencement. If that noble and learned lord acted from the same principle of the right hon. gentleman, that of supporting an administration because he thought it a bad one, he wished to know what his opinion must be of its profligacy, since he went so far as to accept an office under it? But above all, it was owing to that panic that the right hon. gentleman to whom he had alluded before had lost his fine taste entirely, and had become the slave of the most ridiculous pantomimic trick and contemptible juggling, and carried about with him daggers and knives to assist him in efforts of description. It was through



this panic also that the milk of the Christian religion had lost its mildness, and a spirit of intolerance had renewed its fierceness from the pulpit. He adverted to the letter signed by Mr. Wyndham and others, and addressed to the Whig Club, in which they signified their intention of withdrawing from the club. Mr. Sheridan represented this letter as an effect of nothing but panic; for otherwise a gentleman could never have thought of going such lengths in favour of ministers whom he despised, and whom he could not trust, and against a man whom he affected to admire and respect. He never could have thought of withdrawing from a club because it had nobly resolved to resist calumny, and called upon its members to rally round the champion of liberty against whom the shafts of calumny were directed; but who, the more he was calumniated, the dearer he must become to those generous friends who were attached to him for his virtues and his talents. When he found the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Wyndham) leagued against such a man, he declared in a very impassioned tone, that though he was convinced the right hon. gentleman was by nature truly brave, he verily believed the panic which had seized him had not only affected the clearness of his head, but also violated the integrity of his heart. He dwelt much upon the question of parliamentary reform, and showed that he and his friends were blamed for having been true to those principles to which Mr. Pitt and the Duke of Richmond had found it their interest to prove false. He recommended it to his hon. friend (Mr. Grey) to persevere in his intention of making a motion for a parliamentary reform; but he advised him not to make any profession on the occasion; not to promise that as a man and a minister he would support a reform; nor to say that, unhackneyed in the ways of men, he would pursue only the paths of plain dealing and honesty; in a word, not to say that the times were not good enough for him, for all this had been said by a right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt), who had shown that he was a stranger to the performance of the most solemn engagement, and that if he could not accommodate himself to the times, he would make the times accommodate themselves to him. He was sure, he said, that his hon. friend would never be found to resemble such a character; he had a lofty spirit seated in a heart of honour; and what he was convinced was right, that he was sure he would inflexibly pursue. He concluded by making th

following motion, and said that if it was adopted, he meant to follow it up with a motion for an address to his Majesty, praying that he would lay before a secret committee of the house all discoveries made respecting seditious practices, together with all information and letters on the same subject received or intercepted :—

“ That an humble address be presented to his Majesty, praying that he would be pleased to order such communications as may have been received, as to the existence of seditious practices in this country, to be laid before a committee of the house.”

Mr. Sheridan then expressed his surprise at the manner in which Mr. Burke had talked of the conduct of parties, who had long since stated that he was unconnected with any party ; who had gone from the living Whigs to the dead, and whom, having quitted the camp as a deserter, he never suspected of returning to it as a spy. He had borrowed no manner of debate from new connections, having never once departed from his original connections and principles—conduct which some gentlemen might not be very willing to hear stated, nor think entitled to any merit.

*The Speaker reminded Mr. Sheridan that the indulgence of the house entitled him only to reply to points immediately applicable to the motion.*

Mr. Sheridan said, the gentleman who opposed it had said so little that was applicable, and that little tending rather to confirm than confute the propriety of it, that he had nothing to reply to. With respect to any harshness of impression imputed to him, no affectation of candour should ever induce him to spare those whose conduct seemed studiously calculated to throw discredit on the principles he maintained, or the friends with whom he acted.

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MARCH 11.

ROYAL BURGHS IN SCOTLAND.

MR. SHERIDAN informed the house that he had received a great number of petitions from the inhabitants of the royal burghs of Scotland, which, by their desire, he meant then to present. The first in order was from Glasgow, to which, he said, there were thirteen thousand subscribers : after having stated that the prayer of the petition was in general for a reform in the internal government, &c. of the burghs, he moved for leave to bring it



up. Leave was accordingly given, and the petition was brought up and read at full length. On the motion of Mr. Sheridan, it was ordered that it should lie upon the table.

Mr. Sheridan observed, that he thought it proper that this petition should be read at length for the purpose of showing the house what was its real object and tendency; but, as the others were precisely to the same effect, he should desire no more, for the present, than that their titles should be read. The second petition which he delivered, was from the burgh of Lanark. It was received, and laid upon the table with the former.

Mr. Sheridan here remarked, as the delivering the remaining petitions would take up much time, and the house appeared to be impatient to hear Mr. Pitt on the subject of the revenue, and ways and means of the country, he would not say any more for the present, and the business of the budget should not be impeded.

*After some private petitions had been presented,*

Mr. Sheridan begged leave to take that opportunity, there being then a full house, to give notice, that he would on Monday fortnight make a motion founded on the subject-matter of the petitions from the royal burghs of Scotland; and he hoped a right hon. gentleman opposite to him (Mr. Dundas) would, in the interval, seriously turn in his mind the claims of the petitioners who were complaining of great abuses, which were allowed even by that right hon. gentleman to exist, at least, in part; for the Lord Advocate of Scotland had last year moved for leave to bring in a bill, in which he was supported by the right hon. gentleman, for the purpose of removing an abuse, the existence of which was admitted by both. Why the bill had been suffered to drop he could not pretend to say; but this much he would say, that the house, by what it had already done in the business, was actually pledged to grant the petitioners relief, at least in that particular case. He knew many persons, who trembled at the very idea of reform, would tell him this was not the proper time;—in return, he would tell them, a measure could not be out of time which would remove complaints, put an end to divisions, and unite a whole people; such an union would be the more desirable, as the country was then embarked in a war, and stood in need of the united exertions of all its inhabitants. He trusted the right hon. gentleman would take such a part in this

business as would enable him to recover that popularity in Scotland which some people, wickedly, no doubt, said he had lost, though he himself would have the world believe otherwise.

## SUPPLY.

*The house resolved itself into a committee of supply ;—Mr. Pitt stated the expenses of the year and the ways and means by which they were to be met, and moved resolutions accordingly.*

Mr. Sheridan began with saying, whatever difference of opinion there had been respecting the necessity of the war, or the means by which, consistently with good sense and sound policy, it might have been avoided altogether, yet the country being actually engaged in it, the right hon. gentleman, he believed, had done but justice to the house in assuming that his propositions that day would meet with their unanimous assent ; and if exertions were to be vigorous undoubtedly the supply must be liberal. The right hon. gentleman had, however, called on the house to watch the whole of the business with vigilance, and even with jealousy. The call was not necessary to him (Mr. Sheridan), for he had uniformly acted on that principle upon all revenue questions, and, without apologising for an essential act of duty, he would always continue to do so. Under this impulse, although he gave the minister credit for the fairness of some of his statements, yet he must frankly say, he had felt the jealousy recommended, much awakened by the very extraordinary and sudden appeal to the passions of the house with which the right hon. gentleman had concluded his speech. There was little novelty in it, except the novelty of introducing, in a day devoted to figures, all the arts of declamation. He had suddenly laid down his pencil and slate, as it were, and grasping his truncheon had finished with an harangue more calculated for the general of an army going to storm a French redoubt, than a minister of finance discussing accounts in the sober hour of calculation with the stewards and attornies of a burdened and patient people. Whenever he saw exertion and eloquence so misplaced, he always suspected there was some weakness to cover in the subject itself. He was the more led into the apprehension by some very alarming hints the right hon. gentleman had dropped respecting new connections still to be formed. It seemed the expensive corps of 12,000 Hanoverians were not the only foreign troops we were to



pay. New subsidies and foreign mercenaries were announced, and in a manner that seemed to avow that government was adopting the general principles and views of the Austrian and Prussian confederacy, which he had hitherto flattered himself had not been the case. Whatever had been the arguments and wishes of some individuals in that house, he had been in hopes the war was undertaken on the general grounds of opposing the dangerous increase of the French power, and on the principle of never permitting this country, for a moment, to hold its independence at the mercy or forbearance of any other power on earth; but he was sorry to observe symptoms of adopting the contrary line now first appearing in the words and conduct of the ministers. He hoped he was mistaken—for whatever was said of the popularity of the war, he was confident it was not intended by the nation to be a war of vengeance, that *bellum internecinum*, that crusade for the extirpation of opinions and of forms of foreign government which some had rashly recommended, but to which the minister had hitherto appeared too wise to commit himself.

Mr. Sheridan agreed that Mr. Pitt had not overloaded our average income, but he gave the most decided contradiction to his statement, that if peace had continued, or whenever peace was restored, there would be a balance, after paying the peace establishment and the surplus million, of nearly £900,000; this, Mr. Sheridan asserted, was proved by facts and figures to be a most gross fallacy; and there was nothing so dangerous as buoying up people's hopes and making them careless of the consequences of war by such delusions. He took the produce of last year, up to the 5th of January, as stated by the chancellor of the exchequer, and the papers on the table, including the land and malt tax, the total income of the year would be something short of £17,000,000. "This," said the right hon. gentleman, "is £900,000 more than necessary for a peace establishment; and therefore we might reckon on £100,000 whenever peace should arrive. What a mode of arguing! Ten years had passed since the American war, and never had this year of peace establishment arrived! Not one single year in which our expenditure had been less than seventeen millions. Were we ever likely to see it less? Were rigorous reduction in all our military services likely to be the characteristic of a future peace? and when that peace was

obtained, was another ten years' interval to take place before the establishments were to be affected by it? To hold out such hopes was trifling with the country, and not following the open dealing which the minister called for and recommended. The improbability of our revenue continuing at its present standard was also a matter of serious consideration. The more general the war, the more would all foreign merchants be disturbed and commercial capitals be withheld from their objects; and there was no town in Europe where this would not interfere with the trade and manufactures, and consequently the public revenues of Great Britain. Among the ways and means, he objected to nothing but the sum supposed to be forthcoming from the East India Company. This he dwelt on at some length, in declaring, it ought not even to have been mentioned, as it depended solely on the renewal of the charter. That important question ought to have been permitted to come hereafter, as it must come to the consideration of parliament without any previous opinion having been in a bye manner obtained upon it, much less without government and that house seeming to have already accepted the premium which was to be the price of the charter.

Mr. Sheridan concluded with a long recommendation to the house, before they laid a new burden of a single shilling on the people, to enable themselves, by a rigorous scrutiny into all useless places and reversionary sinecures, to look their constituents in the face and assure them that, before they applied to their pockets, they had abolished all unnecessary expenses and unmerited stipends. By doing this, they would not only bring to the public service large sums wrung from the industry and labour of the community, but they would destroy the baits of corruption and teach the government to look to its merits for its support.

*Mr. Pitt's resolutions were put and agreed to, and ordered to be printed on the next day.*

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MARCH 13.

DUTY ON COALS.

*Mr. Alderman Curtis moved, "That the petition presented some time since on behalf of the citizens of London, praying that the duty laid on coals in the reign of Queen Anne might be referred to a committee, that they might report their opinion thereon, as it should appear to them, and to the house."*

MR. SHERIDAN said, if it could be proved that no mode could



be adopted to supply the loss of £130,000 to the public, he should vote against the present petition, because he was sure we could not spare that or any other sum at present; but Mr. Pitt had said nothing that could lead to a hope that, even when the war should be concluded, that this tax shall be taken off or modified; all he said had tended to lay an eternal bar against it. If a committee were to be gone into, the objection of lessening the revenue might be answered by providing that the duty should continue during the continuance of the war. Mr. Sheridan made several other observations tending to enforce the propriety of committing the petition to proper inquiry.

*The house divided; for committing the petition 35; against it 77. The house adjourned.*

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MARCH 15.

ARMY ESTIMATES.

*In a committee of supply, the secretary at war rose to move the several estimates.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, the argument that men, by any disapprobation of the measures of government, were acting against the interests of their country, when the marked misconduct of ministers was what every member of the house ought to reprobate, would be a plea for a general indemnity to ministers, however weak or wicked might be their conduct. Support, with a vigilant observation of their conduct, was a support for which the present ministers would be as little disposed to thank any other gentleman as his right hon. friend. The support which they wanted was of another sort lately described in the house, a support that should increase with their demerits—a confidence that should increase as they showed themselves less worthy of it. When the chancellor of the exchequer lashed the errors of administration in the American war, which his right hon. colleague (Mr. Dundas) defended, he did not think that he was supporting the enemies of his country. But the sentiments of the right hon. gentleman were very properly changed with his situation. To say that ministers had not done all they could was giving encouragement to the enemy. It was to say, that whatever opinion they might have been led to form from the neglect and delay of ministers, the country possessed great vigour and great resources capable of being brought into action when ministers

were made to do their duty. They themselves had admitted, that early in December they stopped the French supplies of corn as a measure of precaution against an enemy in a state of preparation for war. Could they produce any reason to show that it was not as proper to begin preparations of defence as to interrupt the preparations of the enemy? On the very first day of the meeting of parliament he had said, that if we were to have a war, it ought to be a war of activity and vigour; and had ministers but acted as they talked so it would have been. But they seemed to have exhausted the whole spirit, to have unbraced the whole energy of their minds in declamation in parliament; and, when the season for action came, to have been incapable of acting. He hoped the lesson they had now received would prevent the necessity of another of the same kind. He trusted that they would not be found as backward in their naval as in their military preparations; and that if, as was reported, a French fleet had sailed from Brest, there was a British fleet to meet it whatever might be its destination.

*The question was put on the resolutions, and agreed to.*

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MARCH 21.

TRAITOROUS CORRESPONDENCE BILL.

*The order of the day for the second reading of the bill for preventing all traitorous correspondence, &c. with France during the present war, was called for, and carried after a debate. The attorney-general moved that it should be committed on the following day.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, he joined the worthy magistrate (Mr. Alderman Anderson) who spoke last, in hoping that, by a vigorous exertion on our part, the war would be brought to a happy termination; he hoped also, that our ships may be out of danger, and he trusted he might safely place confidence in his Majesty's ministers that, by their exertions, they would soon convince us that the rumour gone abroad lately, that we were not able to attack ships under the French flag, was unfounded; he trusted, that whatever might be these rumours, the worthy magistrate would not be found to have been too sanguine upon that subject. Mr. Sheridan said, he did not mean to follow the learned gentleman (the attorney-general) through all his observations to-night upon the question now before the house, for the learned gentleman seemed to him to have forgotten the question entirely;



had he been either a little more slow or more alert in his thoughts, he might, perhaps, have met the subject upon it. The question was, whether, upon the discussion of this important bill, the short space between this and Tuesday next should be allowed to endeavour to understand the clauses of the bill. The learned gentleman of course having studied the subject, must understand it perfectly; but he had not said one word why other gentlemen, in order to understand it also, should not have time, as well as himself. Upon the former stage of this bill, the learned gentleman said nothing pressing upon the point of time; indeed, nobody could suppose that much expedition was thought of upon the subject; for war had been declared against us long before any notion was given of any intention of bringing in this bill. There was another reason for some delay, and one which had been pressed a good deal by the learned gentleman himself when he opened the bill; he meant the assistance of gentlemen of the long robe, particularly that of a learned and most able member of that house and ornament of his profession (Mr. Erskine); that assistance could not be had if the house went into the committee to-morrow. As to the bill being in some parts of it tyrannical, Mr. Sheridan observed, that part of the subject had not been fairly treated by the advocates for the bill; they said there was no evil in it for which there was not a remedy. If a man came from France, and was taken into custody for not complying with certain capricious distinctions, he might apply to the secretary of state to be discharged, and he should have his liberty. How? If the secretary of state pleased, but not otherwise. Could anything be more tyrannical than such a measure? As to the libel on the people of England, that there were many of them disposed to sedition, that the present times are full of danger, and that the bill in question is only a mitigation of the law of treason as formed by the founders of the revolution, there was the most gross misapplication—at the time when the alterations were made in the act of King Edward III. and quoted as a specimen, there was indeed reason to apprehend sedition and rebellion; that was a law in consequence of the petition of the people praying for it, and it was carried against the influence and in direct hostility to the crown. Indeed, Mr. Sheridan said, it was matter of astonishment to him that gentlemen could show their faces to the people and tell them, gravely, that there is treason

and sedition in this country ; that there are the same reasons at this day for the bill in question as there was at the time of the revolution ; that the present moment required the same restraint as when there was a plot against the safety of the state ; that the people, when they were quiet, must submit to be treated as traitors ; and that at this hour the same rigour in principle was to be observed. Men were brought daily to the block when there was a plot for the assassination of King William. To say that these were times still more dangerous ! upon his honour, he was astonished at the effrontery of such observations. He was sure the charge of sedition on the people of this country was a foul calumny upon them. Let the attorney-general produce his proofs. Let him tell that house that he would take up one man in the kingdom for treason. Let him charge one man with a seditious view. But whenever these questions were asked, instead of showing the existence of the evil, ministers contented themselves with producing a remedy. Did we ask for proof of sedition ? " Look at the alien bill," was the answer. They proved the distemper, by insisting on providing a remedy. Like a physician saying to a person who knew himself to be well, " You want physic ;" or, " You must be bled to-day." If the answer is, " I am well, I do not want your assistance ;" then the doctor would affect a resolute tone and insist on bleeding his patient to-day : and if he did not then find himself ill, to put him in a strait waistcoat to-morrow. With respect to what the right hon. the chancellor of the exchequer had said upon Whigs and Tories, Mr. Sheridan did not doubt his skill. He did not know any person so well situated to prove that a man may affect to be a Whig, and be a Tory in his heart : he did not know a man who had greater reason to feel what he said upon that subject, or to understand it better. However, he believed that if the right hon. gentleman meant anything by what he said on that subject, he meant to convey a sentiment and establish a doctrine the most pernicious to all public liberty—that public profession of principle is altogether a piece of delusion upon the people of this country. This was done by the minister with a view of bringing all public spirit into contempt, to destroy all distinction between the friends of freedom and the friends of despotism, and to build his own power upon the ruin of both ; but whatever he might think, there was too much good sense in the people of this coun-



try to be imposed on by such stale attempts; they began to see the difference between their friends and those who wished to deceive them. Mr. Sheridan concluded with saying, he had no doubt but that ministers began to feel that the story of seditions, and all the trade of the alarmists, began to flag, and therefore this bill was brought in to revive the delusion; but the people might be said to be like those who are sworn at Highgate—they never would take counterfeit while they could have the reality.

*Mr. Pitt explained, that he did not allude to the number of dissatisfied or seditious persons in this country when he mentioned our being in danger. By danger he meant the propagation of certain principles, which, if carried to their full extent in this country, it would be in a worse situation than even in the time he mentioned. With respect to the insinuation of the hon. gentleman upon Whigs and Tories, if any abandonment of principle was ascribed to him, or the attempt to subdue all principle in political considerations, he begged leave to say, it was an imputation which he disdained. He then insisted that he held not the principles of some persons who had lately called themselves Whigs, but the principles of liberty settled at the revolution.*

Mr. Sheridan said, he did not care whether the right hon. gentleman disdained the imputation, only the more disdain he expressed, the more Mr. Sheridan thought he had put the point aright. The right hon. gentleman said he was not one of the living Whigs, or those who lately called themselves so. Indeed, Mr. Sheridan said, he did not hear him name any living Whigs, but observed, that he seemed to allude to some dead ones; I wish, said Mr. Sheridan, he would take some of our Whig principles from us, instead of Whig members.

*The motion was carried.*

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MARCH 22.

TRAITOROUS CORRESPONDENCE BILL.

*The house went into a committee on this bill. On the preamble being read by the chairman, which stated that it is expedient more effectually to prevent traitorous correspondence, &c. &c. the solicitor-general moved, "That the consideration of the preamble should be postponed till the different clauses of the bill should be gone through." The motion was supported by Mr. Hawkins Browne, who was called to order by Mr. Bouverie, as having, in the course of his speech, deviated from the question.*

Mr. SHERIDAN agreed that the hon. gentleman opposite to him (Mr. Browne) had been perfectly in order; but it had been said that his hon. friend (Mr. Fox) had been disorderly in his oppo-

sition to the postponing the preamble, which he could by no means admit. It might be true that in many cases it was usual and proper to postpone the preamble; but in this case, where the assumptions in the preamble afford the only justification of the enactments of the bill, to desire of gentlemen to postpone the preamble, without requiring any proof of these assumptions, was, in truth, desiring them to agree to all these enactments of such a new and alarming nature, without requiring the smallest evidence that there is any ground of necessity for them whatever.

*After some further debate,*

Mr. Sheridan rose again and said that the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) who had just sat down had, as he usually did, made a very eloquent speech; and, as usual also, employed his wit, his mirth and humour, upon subjects which did not perhaps call for either—wars, treasons, murders, or massacres. He should not follow the right hon. gentleman upon all he had said, because that would be entering into the discussion of points arising out of the clauses of the bill, which, in his opinion, ought to be reserved for discussion in the committee. The right hon. gentleman had begun with saying he was always desirous of appealing to the house on the sense of what he called the good times of the constitution. Mr. Sheridan said he should be glad to join in that appeal if he saw it done with an honest intention, or if he did not see that this was done by gentlemen who only referred to those times when they had to introduce any subject which had for its object the increase of their own power hereafter, and took references from times of danger, for the purpose of quoting the degree of confidence which was then thought to be necessarily reposed in the officers of government, and thus the better to prepare the people at this time for the same confidence, when the same danger did not exist, and consequently where there could not be the same reason for such confidence and power. Here the right hon. gentleman's deception began. He said, that immediately after the declaration of rights, and the bill of rights, came a power by which the king was enabled to order any person to be taken up, and that on suspicion only of being an enemy to the state. Having advanced thus far, the right hon. gentleman then came to a conclusion directly, that what was done on that occasion should certainly, by the fairest reason, be done on this—"For," said he, "would you not do now what the wisdom and virtue of your an-



cestors prompted them to do under similar circumstances?" The answer was plain and short—"The circumstances are not similar. We were, at the time that the right hon. gentleman alluded to, at the æra of a revolution." Was that the case with this country at this moment? Did the right hon. gentleman, or did they who pretended to agree with him mean to say, and to persevere in it as an argument, that we are now in an equal degree of danger as we were at the time of the revolution? If this was answered in the affirmative, then there might, upon that answer, be an end entirely to every barrier which the subject ever had against oppression; for if we were now in a state as alarming as at that period, the argument would go to the suspension of the Habeas Corpus act, and to place the whole kingdom under martial law. But it seemed that the present time was to be considered similar to that of the revolution to a degree only—to what degree? If two or three factious persons could be named in this country, was that to be considered as similar in such a degree to the time of the revolution as to render it necessary to introduce the same measure of precaution as at that period? But who were these very factious persons? Upon this, however, the right hon. gentleman had come to something like a pledge that he would name certain persons of that description at some future day—"I now challenge him to name those persons when he pleases," said Mr. Sheridan, "for painful as these observations are for me to make, I must repeat to that right hon. gentleman that I expect to hear his list of names and his proofs;—but then let me tell him what sort of proof I shall require of him." He meant not to be satisfied with the right hon. gentleman's reiterating his charges vaguely, or even of his naming any particular men, and calling them traitors, because we all knew the facility with which that could be done. Nor did he mean to say he should be contented with hearing general assertions of our danger. He should expect to hear the right hon. gentleman mention the names of the conspirators, and what they were, and what measures they had taken to manifest their intentions, and consequently to justify the right hon. gentleman with loading them with the black appellation of traitors. He should expect also, of all the supporters of the bill in question, as a matter of necessity, and as a measure justified by precedent, some proof of that necessity. If they failed in this, then he must declare them the calumniators of the people

of this country. At the time which was now said to be similar to the present—he meant the revolution—something like evidence was given of the necessity of the measures which parliament adopted. A plot had been formed against the king's life, and the king himself came to parliament and informed them of the discovery of the plot, in a speech which he delivered from the throne. [Here Mr. Sheridan read the speech of King William to the parliament—the substance of which was, that there was a plot to assassinate his Majesty.] Would the right hon. gentleman assure us that his present Majesty had made such a declaration to him, even in private—that there was a plan laid for the sudden invasion of the kingdom (of which there surely could be no danger while we had so vigilant and active an administration), that some of the conspirators were already in custody, and that care had been taken to have the others discovered? Now, to be plain with gentlemen who said this bill was necessary, he must say that he wanted proof something like this. And what was the case in the present moment, and how stood facts with respect to sedition in this country? Why, he believed there was one editor of a newspaper who had been frightened by ministers, and had run away; an attorney was under prosecution on a charge for which he had given bail; and a bill-sticker was in gaol? These were the mighty proofs of the whole country being in a state of insurrection! But to come nearer to the right hon. gentleman's doctrine, and the consistency of his conduct, he had, in the course of the discussion on this subject, maintained the right of the legislature to alter the succession, and to support the principle of punishing those who asserted a contrary doctrine; and yet, if the right hon. gentleman was to be judged by his first pamphlet on the French revolution, he would be the first to incur that penalty. Having said this, he returned to what appeared to him to be the real spirit of treason; and he desired the learned gentlemen on the other side to refute him if they could. The true way of defining treason was by the intention of the party; and the overt-act was only to be regarded as evidence of the intention. As to the observations of the right hon. gentleman, on the necessity of rights remaining in a state of inaction for a long time, that they might acquire new vigour; and his simile of sleep to the body being naturally the same as inactivity for a time to the body politic, there was no doubt of its being beautiful



enough, and applicable too, for the minister had often sung a sort of lullaby to the constitution. But as sleep was the sister of death, and yet relieved the human body from the weariness of labour, surely there was no propriety in comparing it to the affairs of human life, and the benefit of civil rights; for, although a human being might sleep to recover his health, there was no necessity for rights in society to be suspended in order to be preserved. The only objection he had to the figure was, that it had no truth for its foundation, for there was none of the weariness which required rest to any of the rights of the people of this country. The right hon. gentleman had made some allusions to a fortress, and said, that it was in some degree like a prison, but it became so only in consequence of a siege. Here again truth was not attended to in the figure, and upon this occasion he could not help coming to some facts well known to the public. This he did to show that there was not any ground for alarm in this country; and when he had done so, he trusted he should have answered the right hon. gentleman upon his observation of a fortress, evidently designed to prepare the people of this country for slavery, by comparing the island to a besieged fortress. Then he must ask whether there was any real cause of alarm when the Duke of Richmond converted the Tower into a fortress, and gave it all the appearance of a place preparing to hold out against an attack? Was there any information of designs being formed for the taking of it? Were there any well-grounded apprehensions of danger? If there were, then the precaution of the noble duke was right: if not, he must say that this was part of the system adopted by ministers for a well-understood purpose; they raised an alarm which themselves did not believe. The right hon. gentleman said, it was not necessary in all cases to prove the existence of the crime before he produced the remedy. Here again, Mr. Sheridan said, he must observe, the right hon. gentleman was wrong in principle; it was the essence of justice never to enforce a hardship without a proof of its necessity. As to the right hon. gentleman's observation upon a law which prohibits a certain number of people going together with blacked faces, which he instanced as a proof that the law prohibits a thing innocent in itself, for the sake of preventing an evil that might possibly attend it, he must say, that here again the right hon. gentleman was wrong; for this very act was not passed without proof of

there being a number of persons who frequently had disguised themselves in that manner for mischievous purposes. However, he was far from saying that a man should never make use of any art in support of his virtuous intentions. If any person carried a concealed dagger for the purpose of assassination he was amenable to the law; but if he only brought it with him concealed, and made use of it for the purpose of heightening the effect of an oratorical attitude in the delivery of a sublime speech, he certainly was not. Again, the right hon. gentleman had alluded to the act of parliament which prohibited ships of a certain size and form from being employed in certain parts of commerce in which the revenue was interested;—an act, Mr. Sheridan said, which was harsh enough, and such as he did not approve of, but yet it was not passed before there had been proof laid before parliament of the evils existing which this act was proposed to remedy.

Thus far he had chosen to follow the right hon. gentleman on his own ground, that laws were made against things in themselves entirely innocent for the purpose of preventing mischief. The truth, Mr. Sheridan said, was certainly so; but then the right hon. gentleman forgot to add a few words, a little essential to the sense of the maxim, “after some proof was given of the necessity of such a law;” the whole of this had been totally neglected by the right hon. gentleman and all the advocates for the present bill. The right hon. gentleman said, that, as to the destruction of the constitution, he had no apprehension of it, and that he had no thought of giving it up; and then he launched out, as usual, into bitter invectives against the new affairs of France. Mr. Sheridan said, he had no objection to our avoiding to imitate the French, and to act for ourselves in everything. He wished that French principles, old as well as new, should be resisted; but if, in resisting the new, we inclined to imitate the old system of government in France, we should have no reason to congratulate each other upon our prudence. The old system of that country united all things that were hateful to a lover of liberty. It was kept up by the most abominable mode that ever was known in any part of Europe—by military insolence instead of civil law; by extraordinary trust and confidence in the king’s ministers instead of watchfulness and jealousy; by tame acquiescence in all his measures instead of resisting or examining any part of them; he wished, therefore, that as we rejected the new system of poli-



ties in France, we should take care not to fall into any imitation of the old. As to what the right hon. gentleman had said about giving up, if that became inevitable, the liberty of his country; and his remark, that were he Cæsar he should rather yield to Brutus than to the great monarch of Persia, the situation of this country was not so bad as to make it necessary to enter into the imagination of any man that there was any danger to be apprehended to us from any disputes between individuals to any number, much less between any two individuals. But there might be danger in placing such confidence in any one as to be blind to the tendency of his measures, and suffering him to proceed without opposing them; for when Hannibal penetrated Italy and arrived at the gates of Rome itself, notwithstanding all the devastation he made, Rome recovered. After the Romans were attacked and the city sacked by the Gauls Rome recovered; but after Cæsar had usurped the dominion it never recovered; nor should he think this country safe, if any man in it, whatever his station might be, should be suffered to proceed proudly, haughtily, and arrogantly, as if he were above the law; and should afterwards, by raising a false alarm among the people, by saying that the constitution was in danger, that there were traitors in the country, ultimately obtain his object—the placing himself in his situation with an establishment of despotic power. The next point to be considered, was that of the charges against the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) in the national convention. That right hon. gentleman had taken upon himself, on that occasion, to make use of the *visites domiciliares*, as practised in France, as a proof of their violation of the principles of justice. It was certainly harsh enough; but upon this point the right hon. gentleman might find some topics at home that would very worthily employ his wit, if he pleased; for to him the grievances and distresses of mankind were subjects of mirth. He might see in this metropolis the *visites domiciliares* thriving wonderfully under the auspices of Mr. Reeves and the society of which he was so worthy a president; as also under Mr. Luke Ideson and Sir Joseph Banks; these gentlemen, by themselves and agents, particularly the latter, had entered into a great number of houses and had called upon the occupiers of them to give in a particular description of their inmates, the sex, the age, the stature, the colour, the complexion; in short, Sir Joseph particularly had examined into these cir-

cumstances with all the curiosity of a naturalist ; and he must say, that unless we abandoned this practice we should complain with an ill grace of the *visites domiciliares*. As to the danger to which the right hon. gentleman alluded, and to which he said he was exposed, unless he has more apprehension of it than I have for him, said Mr. Sheridan, he will be pretty easy under that consideration. But, indeed, if he had not said he quoted from the *Moniteur* I should have thought that he was speaking from his own mind, and for himself, as the whole of the matter is perfectly like the substance of his own speeches upon the affairs of France. As to the gold to which the right hon. gentleman had alluded, certainly he had been a little public in the declaration as well as the circumstances with which he had accompanied it ; he had, indeed, in the hints he had thrown out upon that subject and the possible effect of it, reminded Mr. Sheridan of the practice in the trial of Sir Robert Walpole, when gentlemen in that house used to cry out “ Places ! places ! places ! ” But as to places, whether it was that gentlemen had lately gone over to the minister in such numbers that there was not room for them all, or that, in the language of John Bull, they had eaten up all the corn already, he knew not ; but he believed that, all circumstances considered, there was a tolerable security, at least for a time, for the independence of the right hon. gentleman. As to the observation of the noble lord, that in all other wars between this country and France the two countries had respectively paid attention to the constitution of each other, he wished to know whether the noble lord thought the fact so, when that power wanted to force us to accept a pretender to the throne ? and whether, if the French do not again receive Mr. Frost with an address and think proper to have another king, that we shall then be in a state wherein we shall have nothing to fear ?

*The question “ That the preamble be postponed,” was put and negatived.*

*Mr. Fox wished that the attorney-general would explain in what respect the statute of Edward III. was doubtful, and how far the present law was declaratory, and how far enactive ? He begged likewise to know whether it was to be temporary or perpetual, and argued on the inconveniences which he conceived to be necessarily attendant on either case. Mr. Fox regretted that the business should be brought on during the absence of his learned friend, in consequence of his necessary attendance on the circuit, when otherwise it might have been expected to receive so many lights from his professional knowledge.*

*The attorney-general explained what parts of the bill were declaratory and*



*what enactive. He regretted the absence of his learned friend, but said that if the bill was postponed on that account, it would have to fall into other hands than his own, as he was obliged shortly to go into the country on a business perhaps at least equally urgent.*

Mr. Sheridan observed, that the learned gentleman had said nothing on the subject of the amendment of his hon. friend, and thought that he had not been sufficiently explicit in answering the questions that had been put to him relative to the present bill. According to the first clause of the present bill, if a man thought proper to send a pot of anchovies or a box of macaroni to his friend abroad he might be hanged. Was that clause enactive or merely declaratory?

*The solicitor-general spoke a few words relative to the penalties of the bill.*

Mr. Sheridan asked, whether or not by the words, "within any of the dominions of his Majesty, or being a subject of his Majesty," it was meant that the act should apply to his Majesty's Irish subjects; and also, whether or not by the words, "occupied by any force employed, or to be employed by France, or in alliance with France," it was meant to extend the penalties of the bill to supplying with the enumerated articles any port in the dominions of any state that might be over-run by, or drawn into an alliance with France, and what, in this case, was to be the definition or construction of force?

*The attorney-general said the clause did not bear that construction; and that a man could be alone guilty of high treason under it who should send the enumerated goods to a place occupied by a naval or military force acting with, or preparing to act, in aid of France.*

*A debate ensued respecting the manner in which Ireland was affected by the bill.*

Mr. Sheridan said, those only were to blame for the present discussion who had so framed their clause as to open a door to jealousies and discontents in Ireland; and those were the friends of both countries who wished to remove all grounds for jealousies and discontents between two nations who had one common interest. The bill to which allusion had been made was so far from having been hasty or unwise, that it was to that very bill we were indebted for the preservation of the connection between the two kingdoms. No man was more convinced than he was of the necessity of a good understanding between both; and he had not a doubt if left to themselves they would for ever agree. The Irish parliament had never yet refused to adopt any law which England thought fit, for the benefit of the empire, to make the law of the two

countries; nay, it had re-enacted the Irish act, by which, and by which alone, the crown of Ireland was annexed to that of England. As for himself, he was so thoroughly persuaded that the two nations ought to act upon the same principle that, hostile as he was to the present bill, and wishing most sincerely that it might never pass into a law here, yet should it become an act of the British parliament it would give him very great concern indeed if it was not adopted by Ireland; because if it was not, England could not reap the benefit which she expected from it if it should be re-enacted by the parliament of Ireland. The good sense of the latter would always make her co-operate with England in the general cause, and there could not be good policy in forcing upon her, by a side wind, a measure which he was convinced she would be forward enough to adopt of her own accord. Adverting to Mr. Pitt's doctrine of the two kingdoms mutually legislating for each other, he said it reminded him of the manner in which a deep philosopher of Cambridge had once solved the question, whether the sun turned round the earth or the earth round the sun? his answer was, "partly both, for it is sometimes one and sometimes the other." Mr. Sheridan afterwards pointed out several amendments which ought to be made in the clause, besides those which the learned framer had allowed to be necessary; and he said he would not consent to pass over the clause in its present shape under a promise that provisos should afterwards be brought up for removing the various objections to the clause; for though such provisos were often promised he seldom ever saw them afterwards produced, or produced in the stage that was expected.

*The attorney-general moved, "That the chairman should leave the chair, report progress, and ask leave to sit again." This was carried.*

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MARCH 25.

TRAITOROUS CORRESPONDENCE BILL.

MR. SHERIDAN began with alluding to the change that had taken place in the arrangement of the business of the week, and expressed his satisfaction that the hon. and learned gentleman (the attorney-general) did not now conceive his bill to be so pressing as he and its other supporters had done a few days ago, but had been taught to think that a matter of such momentous importance required at least some little consideration. Mr.



Sheridan proceeded to say, that with respect to the business to which he was now to call the attention of the house, his instructions had been, and his intention was to have brought forward, as on that day, such facts and arguments as he trusted would have fully supported the motion which he meant to have submitted to the house, that leave should be given to bring in a bill for reforming the internal government of the royal boroughs of Scotland. He had, however, been given to understand, that if the object of the bill which he now wished to introduce was meant to be carried as far as his former propositions on the subject had gone, which was certainly the case, a determined opposition would be given even to the motion for leave to bring in the bill, by which means the matter would end without any investigation, and the great purpose of those numerous and respectable bodies of men who had sent up petitions to that house would be thereby defeated, viz. the having all the facts and evidence on the subject fully and fairly considered and discussed. This being the case, he found himself inclined to change his plan and to follow the mode which had been adopted last year, of moving to go into a committee of the whole house to take into consideration the several petitions which had been presented in the present session, with the accounts and other papers on the table. He thought he might be justified in saying that such admissions on the subject had been already sanctioned by the house in the proceedings which took place last session on the lord advocate's bill, &c. as ought to be a pledge against refusing leave to bring in such a bill as he would have to propose; but on this he did not wish to rest, since he was told an opposition was intended, because a full and fair inquiry, which is the great wish of the petitioners as expressed in their petitions, would perhaps be best answered by going into a committee. It was indeed impossible that the subject could be so well discussed, or that all the circumstances of which evidence had been adduced could be so fully understood and canvassed in the house as in a committee. The mode of proceeding which he would adopt in the committee would be, first, to move a string of resolutions founded on facts with respect to existing abuses; secondly, to detail the mode of remedy which he would propose; and thirdly, the result would be a motion for leave to bring in a bill to effectuate such remedy. He trusted that the right hon. gentleman opposite to him (Mr. Dundas) could have no objection

to taking up the business in this way. That right hon. gentleman had spoken with much feeling, at the beginning of this session, of his unpopularity in Scotland, and he was told that that unpopularity, as far as regarded the present subject, was not so much owing to the opposition which had been given to it by the right hon. gentleman, as to the mode of that opposition, by refusing to go into any inquiry whatever after such a mass of evidence had been laid upon the table in consequence of the orders of the house. It would surely not be said that there was not time to get through this business in the present session, when the right hon. gentleman himself had so much other business yet to carry through; and he hoped also that no remarks would be made on its not being brought forward sooner. The petitioners were unquestionably the best judges as to the proper time of bringing on the subject; and it seemed but a matter of prudence to allow the late panic, whether well or ill-founded, to subside a little before they proceeded in a business which had somewhat the appearance of innovation, though, in truth, it was only in appearance. Mr. Sheridan concluded with moving, "That the several petitions, &c. on the subject of a reform in the internal government of the royal burghs of Scotland, should be referred to a committee of the whole house."

*Mr. Dundas proposed, instead of a committee of the whole house, the appointment of a select committee.*

Mr. Sheridan said, he would not object to the proposal of the right hon. secretary; for, perhaps, it might tend to shorten time and to bring the business forward in a proper shape. It was rather curious, however, that the right hon. gentleman should be surprised at his not having now moved for a select committee; as it would, no doubt, be recollected that he did so last year, and that it was then more opposed than even in an open committee. There was, he said, a peculiar hardship in the situation of the petitioners, who had fully established, by evidence on the table, that the spirit of their original charters had been departed from; that the public funds of the boroughs had been wasted and dilapidated; that money had been illegally extorted and exacted by assessments and otherwise upon unjust pretences; and that various other abuses had been practised. He had, however, no objection at all to go into the proposition of the right hon. gentleman. As to the appointment of a select committee, provided it should not go into any minute length, and, although the papers and mass



of evidence were bulky, yet he thought, with the helps which the committee would have, it would not be difficult to arrange and digest them; and he conceived they might be enabled to make their report to the house in about a week. He would, therefore, conclude with moving—"That the several petitions presented to this house during the present session, and the papers and accounts presented during former sessions, respecting the internal government of the royal boroughs of Scotland, should be referred to a committee to examine the matter therein contained, and to report thereupon to the house."

*The question was put and carried.*

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MARCH 26.

TRAITOROUS CORRESPONDENCE BILL.

*Mr. Burke spoke at considerable length, and alluded to the possibility of there being traitors in North Britain; he also observed upon the seditious disposition in this part of the country, and the necessity of the present bill.*

MR. SHERIDAN answered Mr. Burke upon all the points to which he had alluded, and renewed the challenge which he gave Mr. Burke on a former debate upon this bill, which was to name the persons whom he loaded with the title of traitors, or friends of the French, or enemies to the constitution, or any of the other odious appellations which his imagination could suggest to him.

*Mr. Burke admitted that he had said the French had endeavoured to create a faction in this country in their favour, and that they had to a certain degree succeeded. He did not know any persons in this country who had been guilty of any overt acts against the constitution; if he had known any such persons, he knew his duty too well to neglect it, and would have given proper information before a magistrate in order that such persons might have been brought to justice. As to the other part, he had no person to name, he only meant that the French had endeavoured to create a faction in their favour in this country, and that they had succeeded to a certain degree.*

Mr. Sheridan, in answer, observed that the right hon. gentleman had said in that house that he could name persons to their confusion, and that there existed a traitorous faction in this country; this he now abandoned; he did not wish to pin him down to his expression, and should take no farther notice of it, nor press anything upon the subject again.

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MARCH 27.

WAYS AND MEANS.—LOAN.

MR. SHERIDAN said that one of the principal causes of the difficulty which the minister had experienced in negotiating the loan, arose from the vast quantity of unfunded debt which was floating in the market: had he funded this debt, he would have found in new exchequer bills a resource that would have secured him from the consequences of being at the mercy of money-lenders. Lord North, by having, during the period of his administration, which preceded the American war, reduced the unfunded debt to a moderate size, was, by that very measure, enabled to raise money on terms much more favourable than if he had suffered the market to be overstocked with floating navy and exchequer bills.

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MARCH 28.

LOAN AND REDUCTION OF NATIONAL DEBT.

MR. SHERIDAN observed, that it had been generally understood that private business would occupy the attention of the house until after five o'clock, and therefore he did not attend until that hour; but he heard, with some surprise, that the resolutions of the committee of yesterday had been read and agreed to in the midst of private business; this, he said, was unfair and uncandid, and he had no doubt that many gentlemen would have observations to make upon the report. Mr. Sheridan maintained that the commissioners of the fund for the reduction of the national debt ought to have been consulted upon the plan of the loan, and that they might, if they thought fit, advance for that loan the sum which was to have been applied to the reduction of the debt, as mentioned by the right hon. gentleman on the opening of the budget.—[Here Mr. Sheridan recited part of the act by which the fund for the reduction of the national debt was created.]—His object, he said, was to know what communication, if any, the chancellor of the exchequer had with the commissioners upon the subject of this loan, previous to his concluding the bargain with the subscribers. Mr. Sheridan then moved, "That there be laid before the house the communication between the chancellor of the exchequer and the commissioners for the reduction of the national



debt, and the reasons assigned by them for not having demanded the right of subscribing to the present loan."

*Mr. Sheridan's motion was negatived.*

#### TRAITOROUS CORRESPONDENCE BILL.

*On the first clause which enacts, that from the 20th of April next, during the continuance of the present war between Great Britain and France, if any person residing in Great Britain, knowingly and wilfully, shall, on his own account or credit, or on the account or credit, or by the direction of any other person or persons whomsoever, or wheresoever resident, sell, supply, or deliver, or send for the purpose of being sold, supplied, or delivered, or shall agree to sell, or deliver, &c. shall be guilty. It was proposed to leave out the words—"shall agree to sell, or deliver."*

*The question being put by Sir Elijah Impey, the chairman of the committee, strangers were, as usual, ordered to withdraw. In the interval, a number of gentlemen who had not been in the house when the question was put, entered, and seated themselves on the ministerial side.*

Mr. Sheridan insisted, that as they were not present when the question was put, they were not entitled to vote.

*Mr. Dundas contended, that the question having been put before the gallery was cleared, it ought to be put again.*

*This brought on a conversation on the point of order, which the Speaker at last decided in favour of Mr. Sheridan, laying it down as the old established rule, that the question might be put either before the gallery was cleared or after, and that being once put, those who were not in the body of the house at the time could not be permitted to vote.*

*The gentlemen who came in after the question was put were ordered to withdraw, and the committee divided.—For leaving out the words 27; against it 51.*

MR. SHERIDAN observed that as the chancellor of the exchequer had been so generous as to allow the French coats to their backs and stockings to their legs, he might as well let them have a few boots and shoes from his constituents at Stafford, and moved an amendment to that effect; but the amendment was rejected.

*About ten o'clock a second division took place on an amendment moved by Mr. Sheridan, to secure the interest of the foreign proprietors in the British funds—ayes 34; noes 113.*

#### APRIL 4.

#### TRAITOROUS CORRESPONDENCE BILL.

*On the clause prohibiting, under the pain of treason, the purchase, &c. of lands in France, the solicitor-general moved an amendment, for the purpose of limiting its prohibitions solely to the purchasing, or agreeing to purchase lands, by omitting altogether the other prohibitions contained in the clause as to the purchase of assignats, &c. This was carried, and further amendments proposed. Mr. Fox said, as the clause was now limited, he was convinced it could be persisted*

*in for no other reason than that gentlemen on the other side of the house having been obliged to abandon the most offensive parts of the bill, thought it rather too much to give up the whole.*

Mr. Sheridan entirely agreed with his hon. friends. He thought the clause as now amended so perfectly nugatory that it would be very much like prohibiting a gardener to lay out a garden and make hot-beds, &c. in Lapland. In fact the present bill, as it now stood, instead of bearing its present title, ought to be called a bill to authorise British subjects to clothe the French army with wool-len cloth, and to prohibit their selling them a pair of boots under the pain of treason.

*The committee divided—ayes in favour of the clause 77; noes 19.*

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APRIL 16.

LORD AUCKLAND'S MEMORIAL TO THE STATES-GENERAL.

MR. SHERIDAN hoped the house would suffer him to speak, though he did not know whether he should, any more than the noble lord (Fielding), conclude with a motion; on that head, he said, he should be determined by the answer to a question which he was going to put to his Majesty's ministers. The question was, whether a paper which had appeared in all the public prints, and was therein styled a paper delivered to their high mightinesses the states-general on the 5th instant, and signed Auckland and Louis de Starhemberg, was an authentic copy of a paper delivered on that day by the English and Imperial ambassadors at the Hague?

*Mr. Pitt replied, that a paper signed by the English and Imperial ambassadors at the Hague, was delivered by them to the states-general on the 5th of April; that he had seen an authentic copy of it, but that he could not tell whether that which the hon. gentleman said had appeared in all the public prints was a correct copy or not, as he had not read it in print. If the hon. gentleman wished to be fully informed on that head, the most proper step for him to take for that purpose, would be to move for an official copy of the paper in question.*

Mr. Sheridan desired to know whether the right hon. gentleman would have any objection to his moving for it at that moment?

*Mr. Pitt said he had: and as the hon. member might probably intend to ground some proceeding on this paper, he would recommend it to him to give notice of the day on which he should move for the production of the state paper to which he had referred.*

Mr. Sheridan accordingly gave notice that he would submit



such a motion on Thursday: and said that if it should be found that the printed paper was an exact copy of the state paper delivered by Lord Auckland to the states-general, he hoped the right hon. gentleman would agree with him that it was as execrable and as unprincipled a paper as had ever disgraced the diplomatic world; and that the noble lord who had dared to present it, ought to be immediately recalled and impeached.

*The house adjourned.*



APRIL 18.

LORD AUCKLAND'S MEMORIAL TO THE STATES-GENERAL.

Mr. SHERIDAN said that last Tuesday he had stated to the house that he should this day move for the production of a state paper; and he assured the house that he did not move for that paper for the information of the house or of the public, nor did he move it for curiosity, but with a view that it should be followed up by a motion for an address instantly to recal Lord Auckland from his present situation at the Hague, and afterwards with one of a still stronger nature. The right hon. gentleman (the chancellor of the exchequer) had wished this motion to be postponed to this day, and he had conformed with that wish. With regard to the paper he should move for, he said, he trusted that, on a very slight inspection of it, every man must be convinced that it could not be either for the honour or the credit of his Majesty's ministers to shelter either Lord Auckland or themselves, by withholding the paper for which he should move, and which was the only document on which he could regularly form his other intended motion: and therefore, without saying one word more, he might move for this paper; at the same time he was aware, that in this paper a great number of others were referred to, most of which had already been before the public, although not officially before that house; and therefore he had no objection to extending his motion to all the documents alluded to.

*A conversation took place between Mr. Pitt and Mr. Sheridan as to the specific papers which would be wanted for the future discussion of the subject: that being settled,*

Mr. Sheridan moved "That an humble address be presented to his Majesty praying that he will be graciously pleased to give directions for laying before the house a copy of the memorial

dated the 5th of April instant, and presented by the states-general to the British and imperial ministers."

*This being agreed to,*

*Mr. Sheridan gave notice of his motion on this subject on Thursday the 22nd, but afterwards put it off until the Thursday following.*

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APRIL 25.

LORD AUCKLAND'S MEMORIAL TO THE STATES-GENERAL.

Mr. SHERIDAN now rose and said, that the motion which he should have the honour of submitting to the house, was one that not only involved the character of the right hon. gentleman (the chancellor of the exchequer) and the whole of his Majesty's ministers, but also the character of the British nation, and therefore was of the highest importance. It had in view that of calling for an explanation of the real intent, nature, purpose, and object of the war in which we were now engaged. Such was the description of the motion with which he should preface his address to the house. In the course of the discussions which had taken place on the present war, on one subject there had been a concurrence of opinion, whatever difference subsisted on others;—that the increasing power and ambitious views of France should be resisted, and our allies protected, was unanimously agreed to. On the subject of the war three different opinions had occurred; the first thought it a war of necessity, but limited as to its object; the second, in which he classed, thought that no administration should permit the independence of this country to be in danger from the exorbitant power of France, or the rights of our allies to be invaded; yet, thinking the security of this country and indemnification to Holland might have been obtained by negotiation, they thought the war, at the period it occurred, not necessary. A third class viewed the power of France as much less pernicious than the principles she had adopted; and abhorring the conduct of those in authority there, thought vengeance and extermination to those men and those principles were objects which this country was bound in interest and duty to pursue. He, and others with whom he had the honour and pleasure to agree, had endeavoured to draw from those gentlemen something like a definition of the extent to which their principles might or would lead them; but from all the discussion which took place upon that subject, nothing like an explanation was given upon



that point. This day, however, he was determined to put the subject to the test, and he should maintain that ministers had abandoned the principles of the war, upon which alone they had the assistance of the moderate, and the general concurrence of the country, and the only principle they themselves were fond of professing, namely, to keep faith with our allies, to check the aggrandizement of France, and to preserve the safety of this country. If, in entering upon this subject, any gentleman expected that he should be brought to pledge himself in the least degree with respect to the principles or the politics of the noble Lord (Auckland), or that he should be influenced by any considerations with regard to that nobleman, such a gentleman would certainly be disappointed; for he must frankly declare that personally against him, or any other person in administration, he had no ill will; but, at the same time, he had no hesitation in saying that he did not respect or esteem him. He would say no more upon that subject, for a reason always conclusive with him, because he was not present; all, therefore, he should say of him, he begged to be understood as speaking of his Majesty's minister at the Hague. In this view, he must say, that he disapproved of every memorial that noble lord had set his name to, from the disturbances in France, down to the signing that of the 5th of the present month, upon which the motion he should conclude with would be founded. All he was concerned in was marked by a sort of officious ostentation which ill became the character he ought to represent. Instead of the moderate language of a minister, desirous to show that he was only an ambassador, he appeared always in the style of a viceroy, whose business it was to dictate and command. The paper with which he announced the war with France, was of this haughty arrogant style, in which he called the National Assembly of France miscreants. Such language, Mr. Sheridan said, was not only improper, but, under the circumstances of the case, inexcusable; it was not the effect of an overpowering warmth which frequently accompanied the animation of debate; they were the cool collected words of an ambassador, who ought to have reflected that he represented his Majesty of Great Britain and the people of England, both of whom, he was sure, would be ashamed of such expressions—expressions which could answer no good purpose; neither our soldiers nor our sailors would enlist the sooner nor fight the bet-

ter for it; and the people of this country ought not to be supposed to use harsh expressions against any others who had the direction of the public force of a nation, still less that they could instruct their own ambassador to be intolerant; such conduct would be disgraceful and ignominious. Here, to illustrate this point, Mr. Sheridan made a quotation from Vattel, on the law of nations, who says, that for nations at war it is necessary to observe, that they ought to abstain from all harsh expressions of hatred, animosity, or contempt of each other, &c. This, he said, appeared to him to contain so good and necessary a lesson to Lord Auckland, that in the next dispatches a copy of it ought to be sent to him. With regard to the specific paper of the 5th of April he objected to it, not only on account of its particular indecency, but also on account of its opening and disclosing a new principle for carrying on the war—a principle hitherto in this country entirely without foundation. The first translation from the French stated, “That some of these detestable regicides are now in such a situation, that they can be subjected to the sword of the law.” But from that which was now upon the table, a new colour was attempted to be given to the sentence, by saying, “liable to be subjected to the sword of the law;” this, he said, was not warranted by the original, for the plain sense of the sentence was, that these persons might be sacrificed, because they were in the hands of the Dutch. Again, the paper stated a recital of a former declaration, that his Britannic Majesty and their high mightinesses would not fail to pursue the most efficacious measures to prevent the persons, who might themselves be guilty of so atrocious a crime, from finding any asylum in their respective states. To which the Dutch gave answer that they would refuse any asylum to such persons; that they would drive them away; but not one word about putting them to death. The war was declared on the 21st of January, and there the matter rested till the 5th of April, and for what reason? Because it was not until this time the commissioners of the convention got into custody. It was only then necessary to say that these regicides should be subjected to the sword of the law, which was, in other words, that they should be put to death. If ministers said they gave no instructions for this, he said he should be perfectly satisfied, and the infamy would only fall upon the individual.—The noble lord proceeded to state in his



memorial that the divine vengeance seemed not to be tardy; upon this he had only to observe that we were engaged in a war which, for our safety, we had pursued to the accomplishment of its originally avowed object; and, with respect to the divine vengeance, from motives of respect, decorum, and piety, we ought to be silent. The memorial was as follows:—

## TRANSLATION.

*High and mighty lords,*

*It is known that towards the end of the month of September, last year, his Britannic Majesty and your high mightinesses gave, in concert, a solemn assurance, that in case the imminent danger which then threatened the lives of their most Christian majesties and their family should be realized, his Majesty and your high mightinesses would not fail to take the most efficacious measures to prevent the persons who might render themselves guilty of so atrocious a crime from finding any asylum in your respective dominions. This event, which was foreseen with horror, has taken place; and the Divine vengeance seems not to have been tardy. Some of these detestable regicides are already in such a situation that they may be subjected to the sword of the law. The rest are still in the midst of a people whom they have plunged into an abyss of evils, and for whom famine, anarchy, and civil war are preparing new calamities. In short, everything that we see happen, induces us to consider as at hand the end of these wretches, whose madness and atrocities have filled with terror and indignation all those who respect the principles of religion, morality, and humanity.*

*The undersigned, therefore, submit to the enlightened judgment and wisdom of you high mightinesses, whether it would not be proper to employ all the means in your power to prohibit from entering your states in Europe, or your colonies, all those members of the self-titled national convention, or of the pretended executive council, who have, directly or indirectly, participated in the said crime; and if they should be discovered and arrested, to deliver them up to justice, that they may serve as a lesson and example to mankind.*

Done at the Hague, this 5th day of April, 1795.

(Signed)

AUCKLAND.

LOUIS C. DE STARHEMBERG.

[The translation above given is the same with that originally inserted in most of the newspapers, from which the translation presented to the house of commons differs, by substituting for the sentence printed in roman—Some of these detestable regicides are already liable to be subjected to the sword of the law—and for wretches, Malheureux, unhappy persons.]

These men were delivered up by the treachery of Dumourier; and Lord Auckland recommended to the Dutch, that they might be murdered and assassinated. He wished to know if it was possible for a more horrid principle to be entertained, or one, if followed up, more likely to be attended with more horrid consequences. Could we suppose that the French would not retaliate? What then would result? a general massacre of all prisoners of

war. Such sentiments were odious to any man possessing the least feeling of humanity. The fate of those people, it seemed, was to be a lesson and example to mankind. He was sure the people of this country detested such lessons and examples. It reminded him of a proclamation recommending the extermination of America, during the war, and whilst the noble lord (Auckland) was commissioner there; and to which there was a very sensible protest, which was supposed to be the production of a right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) now in the house. This was drawn after the able speeches of Mr. Fox, Mr. Powys, and others in that house; and the Duke of Grafton and Duke of Richmond in the other; and was signed by a great number of the first persons in this country. This protest admirably explained the fatal effects of attempting the destruction or dismemberment of an empire. Here Mr. Sheridan read the protest, and observed, that he wished this also to be sent in the next dispatches to Lord Auckland. But again, to return to the paper of the 5th of April, Mr. Sheridan said, he objected to it for a reason which was independent of the general ground he had already stated; it was that of declaring any peace with the people of France utterly unattainable, until there should be dictated, according to the desire of the combined powers, a certain form of government to France. Were we, he asked, at war with the nation of France at this moment? If the principle on which we proceeded to the war was followed, he would say that we were not at war with the nation of France. The object we professed to have in view was accomplished; and we should negotiate with those who had the direction of the public force. Of what use was it to us to call their armies a banditti of robbers, and their mariners pirates? At last we must negotiate with them, or go the length of endeavouring to destroy them altogether—a fruitless and a vain attempt. Was it the object or was it not, of this war, on our part, to assist the conspiracy to dictate a form of government to France, or totally to destroy the whole nation? He wanted a plain explicit answer. Let the minister speak fairly out. The people of England ought to know what were the views of the minister upon this war, and to what extent it was to be carried, that they might not be proceeding under a delusion. Supposing that we had gained our original purpose, he wanted to know how peace was to be obtained, without negotiation with those who have the exercise of govern-



ment. If we countenanced the memorial of Lord Auckland, he should say, that the whole National Convention—all the members of the districts—in short, about eight or nine millions of people must be put to death before we can negotiate for peace. Supposing that we were to join the conspiracy to dictate a form of government to France, he then should wish to know what sort of government it was that we were to insist on. Were we to take the form of it from that exercised by the emperor—or that of the King of Prussia? or was it to be formed by the lady who so mildly conducted the affairs of Russia? or were they all to lay their heads together, and, by the assistance of the pope, dictate a form of government to France? Were the French to have a constitution such as the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) was likely to applaud? Indeed he feared that this was not yet settled; and there were various specimens of what had been already thought of by different powers. There were two manifestoes of the Prince of Cobourg; the one promised the form of government chosen by themselves, in which they agreed to have a monarchy; and afterwards, in the course of four days, this promise was retracted in consequence of the accession of Dumourier to the confederacy. What would the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) say if they should not give the French the form of the constitution of Poland;—or would he content himself with saying, they ought not to have such a constitution? He believed that neither the chancellor of the exchequer nor any of his supporters would say anything at present upon that subject. It appeared however somewhat mysterious, perhaps, that after the congress at Antwerp, in which Great Britain was not unrepresented, that the intention of the combined powers had altered; and that a much more sanguinary mode was to be pursued against France than had been before intended; and perhaps the time might come when the parties might follow the example set by the manifesto of the Duke of Brunswick, and affirm that these were threats which were not intended to be carried into execution. But this was not the way to amuse us. The people of England would not long be content to remain in the dark as to the object of the war. Again he must ask, what was the object of the war? Again he must ask, what was the object of our pursuit in conjunction with the other powers against France? Was it to restore the ancient tyranny and despotism of that nation?

This would please some people, he knew—particularly emigrants; but nothing would be so hateful to the people of this country, or any other where there existed the least love of freedom; nor could anything be more destructive to the tranquillity and happiness of Europe. Were we to join Dumourier in a declaration not to rest until we had put to death those detestable regicides calling themselves philosophers, and all the miscreants who had destroyed all lawful authority in France? If we were, he would venture to say this would be a war for a purpose entirely new in the history of mankind; and as it was called a war of vengeance, he must say that we arrogated to ourselves a right which belonged to the Divinity, to whom alone vengeance ought to be left. If the minister said, that on our part there was no intention to interfere in the internal government of France, he must then ask what were the views of the other powers with whom we now acted in concert against France? Was it to make a partition of France, as they did of Poland? Or should he be told that, as far as regarded the affairs of France under the present power, he was talking of none who ought to be mentioned as a people; that the *sans culottes* were too contemptible a race to be mentioned; he would say, he meant to ask what was to become of the whole nation of France? If he was told that it was impossible for the crowned heads, acting in concert upon this great occasion, to have any but just and honourable views, he would answer that the subject was of too much magnitude to be allowed to pass in such a manner; and in his suspicions he was justified by the example, and fortified by the observation of an hon. gentleman (Mr. Jenkinson) with respect to the father of the present emperor, that no man ought to take his word for one hour. No material alteration, he believed, had taken place in the views of that court since the death of that prince, nor of others in the present confederacy. Were we to forget that the King of Prussia encouraged the Brabanters to revolt, and then left them to their fate? Were we to forget the recent conduct with respect to Poland? Were we to forget the taking of Dantzic and Thorn? Indeed, he thought that those who every day told us, in pompous language, of the necessity there was for kings, and of the service they did to the cause of humanity, they should at least have spared the public the pain of thinking of these subjects, by not entering into the views of that unnatural



confederacy. Indeed, it was impossible for him to dismiss the consideration of Poland, without adverting to an eloquent passage in the work of a right hon. gentleman who was an enthusiastic admirer of the late revolution there. Here Mr. Sheridan quoted the following passage of Mr. Burke's "Appeal from the Old to the New Whigs:"—

"The state of Poland was such, that there could scarcely exist two opinions, but that a reformation of its constitution, even at some expense of blood, might be seen without much disapprobation. No confusion could be feared in such an enterprise, because the establishment to be reformed was itself a state of confusion. A king without authority; nobles without union or subordination; a people without arts, industry, commerce, or liberty; no order within; no defence without; no effective public force, but a foreign force which entered a naked country at will, and disposed of everything at pleasure. Here was a state of things which seemed to invite, and might, perhaps, justify bold enterprise and desperate experiment. But in what manner was this chaos brought into order? The means were as striking to the imagination as satisfactory to the reason, and soothing to the moral sentiments. In contemplating that change, humanity has everything to rejoice and to glory in; nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to suffer. So far as it has gone, it probably is the most pure and defecated public good which ever has been conferred on mankind. We have seen anarchy and servitude at once removed; a throne strengthened for the protection of the people without trenching on their liberties; all foreign cabal banished by changing the crown from elective to hereditary; and what was a matter of pleasing wonder, we have seen a reigning king, from an heroic love to his country, exerting himself with all the toil, the dexterity, the management, the intrigue, in favour of a family of strangers, with which ambitious men labour for the aggrandizement of their own. Ten millions of men in a way of being freed gradually, and therefore safely, to themselves and the state; not from civil or political chains, which, bad as they are, only fetter the mind, but from substantial personal bondage. Inhabitants of cities, before without privileges, placed in the consideration which belongs to that improved and connecting situation of social life. One of the most proud, numerous, and fierce bodies of nobility and gentry ever known in the world, arranged only in the foremost rank of free and generous citizens. Not one man incurred loss or suffered degradation. All, from the king to the day-labourer, were improved in their condition. Everything was kept in its place and order; but in that place and order everything was bettered. To add to this happy wonder (this unheard-of conjunction of wisdom and fortune) not one drop of blood was spilled; no treachery—no outrage—no system of slander more cruel than the sword—no studied insults on religion, morals or manners—no spoil—no confiscation—no citizen beggared—none imprisoned—none exiled; the whole was effected with a policy, a discretion, an unanimity and secrecy, such as have never been before known on any occasion; but such wonderful conduct was reserved for this glorious conspiracy in favour of the true and genuine rights

and interests of men. Happy people, if they know how to proceed as they have begun! Happy prince, worthy to begin with splendour, or to close with glory, a race of patriots and of kings: and to leave

A name, which every wind to heav'n would bear,  
Which men to speak, and angels joy to hear.

To finish all—this great good, as in the instant it is, contains in it the seeds of all farther improvement, and may be considered as in a regular progress, because founded on similar principles, towards the stable excellence of a British constitution.

“Here was a matter for congratulation and for festive remembrance through ages. Here moralists and divines might indeed relax in their temperance to exhilarate their humanity.”

Such, Mr. Sheridan said, was the description which the right hon. gentleman gave of that revolution; was it to be supposed that he would afterwards say, that this ought to have been trampled upon and destroyed, or should suffer such an event to happen and never utter a word upon the subject? He did not think that monarchs of the present day had fulfilled the promises that some persons had made, and which had been expected from them, so that their names might be handed down to posterity as a glorious example of integrity and justice! With respect to the future views of the different powers they might best be conjectured by what had already happened. The Empress of Russia, upon the sincerity of whose motives and integrity of whose actions there could be no doubt, previous to the attack on Poland, among other things in her manifesto, said by her minister—

“From these considerations her imperial majesty, my most gracious mistress, as well to indemnify herself for her many losses, as for the future safety of her empire and the Polish dominions, and for the cutting off at once and for ever, all future disturbances and frequent changes of government, has been pleased now to take under her sway, and to unite for ever to her empire, the following tracts of land with all their inhabitants.”

This was the language for which the confederates were to justify perhaps the future taking under their sway, and uniting for ever to their empire part of the dominions of France. We had heard much of the abominable system of affiliation adopted by the French; but this was a Russian impartial affiliation, and no doubt the confederate powers approved of it. In like manner will they affiliate all France if they can. So will they England when they have it in their power; and he was sorry to say, that if we joined in that infamous confederacy, and the people agreed



to it, England would deserve to be so treated. The empress then proceeded to state what she expected for the favour she had conferred—

“Her imperial majesty expects from the gratitude of her new subjects, that they, being placed by her bounty on an equality with Russians, shall, in return, transfer their love of their former country to the new one, and live in future attached to so great and generous an empress.”

On an equality with Russia! This was a glorious equality, liable to be sent to Siberia with other Russian slaves. For this mighty favour they were to transfer, as naturally might be expected, the whole love they had for their native country to Russia, their new and happy land; for the same minister of this equitable and generous empress proceeded to say—

“I therefore inform every person, from the highest to the lowest, that within one month they must take the oath of allegiance before the witnesses whom I shall appoint; and if any gentlemen or other ranks possessing real or immovable property, regardless of their own interest, should refuse to take the oath prescribed, three months are allowed for the sale of their immovables, and their free departure over the borders; after the expiration of which term, all their remaining property shall be confiscated to the crown.”

Really, after such specimens, one would have supposed, but for the well-known character of the council of these confederate powers, they were acting under the influence of madness, or they would not thus think of insulting the feelings of human nature. But this was not enough; an oath, it seemed, must be taken, for—

“The clergy, both high and low, as pastors of their flocks, are expected to set the example in taking the oath; and, in the daily service in their churches, they must pray for her imperial majesty, for her successor, Great Duke Paul Petrovitz, and for all the imperial family, according to the formula which shall be given them.”

Here again there was evidence of a great and good mind, for this pious empress was determined that perjury should be very general in her dominions, and that the example should be set by the clergy! Mr. Sheridan then proceeded to take notice of the great and good King of Prussia with respect to Dantzic, as specified in what he called his reason for taking possession of part of Poland with his military forces.

“It would certainly militate against the first rules of a sound policy, as well as the duties incumbent on us for the preservation of tranquillity in our state, if in such a state of things in a neighbouring great kingdom, we remained in-

active spectators, and should wait for the period when the faction feel themselves strong enough to appear in public, by which our own neighbouring provinces would be exposed to several dangers by the consequences of the anarchy on our frontiers.

"We have, therefore, in conjunction with her Majesty the Empress of Russia, and with the assent of his Majesty the Roman emperor, acknowledged, that the safety of our states did require to set to the republic of Poland such boundaries which are more compatible with her interior strength and situation; and to facilitate her the means of procuring without prejudice of her liberty, a well ordained and active form of government, of maintaining herself in the undisturbed enjoyment of the same, and preventing by these means the disturbances which have so often shaken her own tranquillity, and endangered the safety of her neighbours.

"In order to attain this end, and to preserve the republic of Poland from the dreadful consequences which must be the result of her internal division, and to rescue her from her utter ruin, but chiefly to withdraw her inhabitants from the horrors of the destructive doctrine which they are but too prone to follow, there is, according to our thorough persuasion, to which also her Majesty the Empress of all the Russias accedes in the most perfect congruity with our intentions and principles, no other means, except to incorporate her frontier provinces into our states, and for this purpose immediately to take possession of the same, and to prevent in time all misfortunes which might arise from the continuance of the reciprocal disturbances.

"Wherefore we have resolved, with the assent of her Russian majesty, to take possession of the above-mentioned districts of Poland, and also of the cities of Dantzic and Thorn, to the end of incorporating them with our state.

"We herewith publicly announce our firm and unshaken resolution, and expect that the Polish nation will very soon assemble in the diet, and adopt the necessary measures to the end of settling things in an amicable manner, and of obtaining the salutary result, to the securing to the republic of Poland an undisturbed peace, and of preserving her inhabitants from the terrible consequences of anarchy. At the same time we exhort the states and inhabitants of the districts and towns which we have taken possession of, as already mentioned, both in a gracious and serious manner, not to oppose our commanders and troops, ordered for that purpose, but rather tractably to submit to our government, and acknowledge us from this day forward as their lawful king and sovereign, to behave like loyal and obedient subjects, and to renounce all connection with the crown of Poland."

Now after this, Mr. Sheridan said, he wished to know whether any robbery that had been committed by the most desperate of the French, or whether any of their acts were more infamous than this? Of what consequence was it to any man, whether he was plundered by a man with a white feather in his hat or by one with a night-cap on his head? He said, that if there could be any difference, the solemnity with which the thing was done was an



aggravation of the insult. The poorer sort of the French could plead distress, and could also say that they had endured the hardships, the toils, and the perils of a winter campaign. But here was nothing but a naked robbery without any part taken in the calamity which gave birth to it. He had alluded to these things merely for the purpose of giving the minister an opportunity of disproving them; he hoped he should not hear the principle avowed. Crowned heads, he thought, were at present led by some fatal infatuation to degrade themselves and injure mankind. But some, it seems, regard any atrocity in monarchs as if it had lost its nature by not being committed by low and vulgar agents. A head with a crown and a head with a night-cap totally altered the moral quality of actions; robbery was no longer robbery, and death, inflicted by a hand wielding a pike or swaying a sceptre, was branded as murder or regarded as innocent. This was a fatal principle to mankind and monstrous in the extreme. He had lamented early the change of political sentiments in this country which indisposed Englishmen to the cause of liberty. The worst part of the revolution in France is that they have disgraced the cause they pretended to support; however none, he was persuaded, would deny that it was highly expedient to know the extent of our alliance with powers who had acted so recently in the manner he had represented, and to have the object of our pursuit in this war distinctly known. The minister may perhaps in future come down to the house and say he is sorry, but it has become highly necessary to interfere with the power of Britain farther, as the crowned ladies and gentlemen of Europe cannot agree about the partition of France, or that such a disposition is about to take place that we shall be worse off than if we had let France remain as it was. Those who feared the attachment of men to French principles argued wrong; from the effect of the experiment they would never be popular; nothing but crimes and misery swelled all the accounts from that country. If the peasant had been represented happy and contented, dancing in his vineyard surrounded with a prosperous and innocent family; if such accounts had come the tidings would have been gladly received; at present we hear of nothing but want and carnage, very unattracting indeed. More danger, he thought, arose from a blind attachment to power, which gains security from the many evils abounding in France. On the same principle that Prussia divided Poland, he

contended they might act here. They declared a prevalence of French principles existed in Poland : his Majesty's proclamation asserts the same here, and is therefore, in this sense, an invitation to come and take care of us. Could such despots love the free constitution of this country ? On the contrary, he was persuaded that, upon the very same principle that Poland was divided, and Dantzic and Thorn subjugated, England itself might be made an object for the same fate as soon as it became convenient to the confederates to make the experiment ; he would defy any man to show the principle upon which a difference could exist with regard to us and the other sacrificed countries in the wishes and desires of the combined powers. But supposing this to be out of all question, and that this country had nothing to dread in that respect, and that all Europe had nothing to look to but the extermination of French principles, how would the present prospect of our success then appear ? Could we entertain so vain a hope (indeed he was astonished to hear it even hinted) that the French, who had all the winter been lying in the snow at some periods, and wading up to their necks in water at others in an enemy's country, fighting for their rights, will, in their own, submit to give them up in a mild season ? The thought was too absurd, and the expectation too extravagant to be harboured by a man possessed of a spark of rationality. It was upon these grounds he asked, what were the lengths to which ministers intended we should go with the present war ? From all the circumstances of the memorial presented by Lord Auckland to the states-general, and the disposition of our allies, as indicated by their late conduct, it behoved this country to come to a distinct understanding on the subject of the nature of our alliances and the objects of the war. This, he thought, would best be obtained by proposing a solemn disavowal and reprobation of the views and dispositions indicated in the memorial of Lord Auckland, and a condemnation of that paper. Our situation required him to be explicit on everything that excited caution ; the state of commercial credit was as alarming as unexpected ; the list of bankrupts was unprecedented ; as many as five hundred commissions had issued in the very short time the present chancellor had held the seals. After ten years' peace we had not reached our peace establishment, and our revenue had never exceeded seventeen millions. A deficiency in our revenue must now be expected, and he had heard that it



was already perceptible to a prodigious extent. He hoped he should not be represented as depressing our spirits and raising those of our enemies. In making these observations it was necessary to be explicit, and not to underrate the difficulties we must of necessity encounter. Ministers, therefore, should not be too much elated at the great and unexpected success of our allies, and enter too easily into their views; on the contrary, he wished them to avail themselves of fortunate occurrences as soon as possible to extricate this country from the evils of war. He concluded with moving, "That an humble address be presented to his Majesty, to express to his Majesty the displeasure of this house at a certain memorial, dated the 5th of April, 1793, presented to the states-general of the United Provinces, signed by the right hon. Lord Auckland, his Majesty's minister at the Hague, the said memorial containing a declaration to the following effect:—'Some of these detestable regicides' (meaning by this expression the commissioners of the National Convention of France delivered to Prince Cobourg by General Dumourier) 'are now in such a situation that they can be subjected to the sword of the law; the rest are still in the midst of a people whom they have plunged into an abyss of evils, and for whom famine, anarchy, and civil war are about to prepare new calamities. In short, everything that we see happen induces us to consider as not far distant the end of these wretches, whose madness and atrocities have filled with horror and indignation all those who respect the principles of religion, morality, and humanity.

"The undersigned, therefore, submit to the enlightened judgment and wisdom of your High Mightinesses, whether it would not be proper to employ all the means in your power to prohibit from entering your dominions in Europe, or your colonies, all those members of the assembly styling itself the National Convention, or of the pretended executive council who were directly or indirectly concerned in the said crime; and if they should be discovered and arrested, to deliver them up to justice that they may serve as a lesson and example to mankind.'

"To acquaint his Majesty of the sense of this house, that the said minister, in making this declaration, has departed from the principles upon which this house was induced to concur in the measures necessary for the support of the war in which the British nation is at present unfortunately engaged; and has an,

nounced an intention, on his part, inconsistent with the repeated assurances given by his Majesty, that he would not interfere in the internal affairs of France; and for which declaration this house cannot easily be brought to believe that the said minister derived any authority from his Majesty's instructions.

"Humbly to beseech his Majesty that so much of the said memorial as contains the declaration above recited, may be publicly disavowed by his Majesty, as containing matter inconsistent with the wisdom and humanity which at all times have distinguished the British nation, and derogatory to the dignity of the crown of this realm, by avowing an intention to interpose in the internal affairs of France, which his Majesty has, in so many declarations, disclaimed; and mingling purposes of vengeance with those objects of defence and security to ourselves and our allies, which his Majesty's ministers have so often declared to be the sole object of the present war.

"To represent to his Majesty, that this house has already expressed its sense of the acts spoken of in the above declaration; but that as neither this, nor any other foreign state, can possess any cognizance or jurisdiction respecting them, the only tendency of menaces against their perpetrators is, to compel this country either unjustifiably to carry on war for the subversion of the present government of France; or disgracefully to seek peace by an ignominious negotiation with the very government whom we have thus insulted and stigmatised in our public acts.

"That these threats must tend to give a peculiar barbarism and ferocity to the hostilities with which Europe is now afflicted, by provoking and reviving a system of retaliation and bloodshed which experience of its destructive tendency, honour, humanity, and religion have combined to banish from the practice of civilised war.

"And finally, to represent to his Majesty how deeply the reputation of his Majesty's councils is interested in disclaiming these unjustifiable and, we trust, unauthorised denunciations of vengeance, so destructive of all respect for the consistency, and of all confidence in the sincerity, of the public acts of his ministers; and so manifestly tending at once to render the principle of the war unjust, the conduct of hostilities barbarous, and the attainment of honourable peace hopeless."



*Mr. Fox followed; after which the question being loudly called for, strangers were ordered to withdraw.*

*Mr. Curwan addressed the house, and congratulated it on the effect of Mr. Sheridan's motion. He contended that the object of it was completely gained; that Lord Auckland's memorial had been in substance disavowed by the minister, and the old ground of the war again brought forward. He therefore wished much that Mr. Sheridan would not divide the house.*

Mr. Sheridan said it was indifferent to him whether the house divided or not. He certainly considered the main object he had in view as completely gained in the minister's explicit disavowal of the principles attempted to be introduced into the war by Lord Auckland, which must have made peace impossible.

*Mr. Whitmore insisted that the house should divide, because he had no faith in the professions of ministers.*

*The house divided; ayes 36; noes 211. The house adjourned.*

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APRIL 30.

STATE OF COMMERCIAL CREDIT.

*On the 25th of April Mr. Pitt moved, "That a select committee of fifteen be appointed to take into consideration the present state of commercial credit, and to report their opinion and observations upon it." This was agreed to; and on the 30th the house resolved itself into a committee upon the report; when Mr. Pitt moved, "That his Majesty should be enabled to direct that exchequer bills to the amount of five millions be issued to commissioners, to be by them laid out under certain regulations and restrictions, for the assistance and accommodation of such persons as may apply for it, and who shall give to such commissioners proper security for the sums that may be advanced for a time to be limited.*

MR. SHERIDAN said he admitted the necessity of some remedy and differed only about the means. In stating the deficiency of the market, the right hon. gentleman took into his account only the loss of the consumption of France, without estimating the great quantity of our manufactures circulated through French ports to other countries. If there was not a great deficiency of market produced by the war, the manufacturers would be overstocked with raw materials instead of manufactured goods. The true remedy for the present distress of the country was for ministers to turn their attention earnestly to peace—not to peace with France only, but to restoring the general peace of Europe. The situation of the country—whether gentlemen liked better to call it humiliating or unfortunate—certainly was not such as to justify the right hon. secretary's mode of argument. To assert

that the distress of commercial credit was owing to the great prosperity of the country might sound very beautiful, but would not be much relished in the city. It would be considered as but a poor compliment to congratulate a man on his having proved himself one of the most industrious manufacturers, or enterprising merchants, by getting into the *Gazette* as a bankrupt. No proof was yet given that the bank directors would refuse to undertake the management of the plan proposed. Let gentlemen look at the report which recommended doing it by commissioners; they would there see that the commissioners must have an able solicitor, able brokers to inspect and value the goods, clerks, &c., and when it was considered that the principal board of commissioners must have subordinate boards with brokers and clerks, the committee must see that the patronage would be most extensive. The chancellor of the exchequer had not consulted his right hon. friend on the choice of the commissioners; and the reason was now plain. The right hon. secretary's extraordinary purity, his confidence that no man could be influenced by partialities or prejudices in the discharge of such a trust, rendered him totally unfit to be consulted. The right hon. secretary, in his own practice at the board of control, and other boards with which he was acquainted, knew so well that favours were conferred with equal readiness on the friends of ministers and of opposition, that he expected the same impartiality everywhere else. Other persons, however, might be influenced by their prejudices without being conscious of it. The commissioners were to judge, not only of the value of goods, but of personal security; and they might think a man unfit to be trusted because he happened to be one of the friends of the people, whose responsibility would have been undoubted, if he had had the good fortune to be an associator. The obvious consequence of the measure would be to bring the whole commercial interest of the country into the most abject subserviency to the minister of the day; for although the remedy was said to be only temporary, people remembering the present calamity would apprehend that such another might happen, and every person would naturally be afraid of being considered as a marked man in the hour of distress.

*The resolution was agreed to.*



MAY 2.

## SHEFFIELD PETITION FOR A PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

*Mr. Duncombe presented a petition on behalf of the inhabitants of Sheffield, signed by eight thousand persons, praying for a parliamentary reform; and moved that it might be brought up. This was opposed on the ground that it was not worded in a manner sufficiently respectful to the house.*

MR. SHERIDAN said that he should not advert to all the singular expressions of the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas), but one appeared to him deserving of some notice, namely, "that it sometimes happened a very wise man said a very foolish thing." The conclusion which the hon. gentleman evidently wished the house to draw from this observation was, that the present chancellor, who made use of the expression alluded to, said a very foolish thing, and such, as in the sober hour of reflection, he would condemn. His present situation allowed him that reflection, and he had no doubt but that that high and exalted character had availed himself of the advantage of that situation, and now thought many things which he said on various occasions were very foolish things. The noble and learned lord had formerly said that the right hon. gentleman, and others with whom he acted, had obtained the power which they now held in a manner perfectly unconstitutional and, as a precedent, highly dangerous to this country—that, the noble and learned lord, he had no doubt, thought a very foolish observation. He had also highly reprobated the conduct of the members of the present administration with respect to the regulation of the affairs of India, and particularly with respect to the India bill; he had said the whole of the measure was of a nature so flagrant that it ought to have forfeited his Majesty's ministers the confidence of the public—that, also, he now, no doubt, thought a very foolish thing. With respect to the present petition being in language not sufficiently respectful, he maintained that the Nottingham petition, to which his hon. friend alluded, was much stronger than the present; and, he must confess, he suspected that the objection to the roughness of the language was not the real cause why this petition was opposed; he was confirmed in this opinion by a recollection of the conduct of the chancellor of the exchequer at the time of presenting the Nottingham petition. And as to the observation of the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas), that the house would not show its taste by receiving this petition, he would say, this petition being

drawn up by poor and plain mechanics, they had not the power of explaining their thoughts in that attic elegance of style for which the right hon. gentleman was so eminently distinguished. Whether the petition could have been better worded to please some hon. members of that house was foreign from the present subject of debate; but for the petitioners to have expressed their thoughts better, or the object of them with more propriety, he maintained to be impossible. They said the house of commons is not, in the just sense of the words, what they were, from form, obliged to term it, the commons of Great Britain in parliament assembled. That was the very grievance they complained of; and they were mild in the choice of their expressions, for if they had said the house of commons at present was not the commons of Great Britain in parliament assembled, they would not have been justified; but they went to no such offensive length in their expressions, for they had, in the conveyance of their meaning, showed the respect they had for the house as it was now constituted. But they went still further, for they added that they, from form, were obliged to term them so. That the house as now formed was not the commons in parliament assembled was a bold assertion. Would the right hon. gentleman say they were so? These things considered, he was ready to affirm that, in his opinion, there was not a more respectful style to be adopted consistently with the spirit of the petition, and the nature of the grievance it complained of and the remedy it called for. He said the language of the petition was correct; and he would ask the gentlemen who objected to it to say they would undertake to prove it was not true; the fact was they felt sincerely the truth of it. As to the manner in which the debate was to be carried on for Monday next, he knew nothing of it; how it would eventuate did not belong to him to anticipate; he feared, however, from the spirit of exultation which he perceived on the other side when that subject was alluded to, that confidence was entertained his hon. friend's motion would be negatived. It was not possible for him to say that it would not then appear to certain gentlemen, and particularly to the chancellor of the exchequer, that what was thought foolish at one time might be thought wise at another, and that what was thought wise at one time might be thought foolish at another. These things were explained to that right hon. gentleman by his great preceptor, the right hon. secretary of state; and he had



not the least doubt but that they were explained to his satisfaction; in this idea he was a good deal confirmed by the solemn silence of the right hon. gentleman. He had no doubt that parliamentary reform appeared to that right hon. gentleman now a very foolish thing. The anticipation, however, of such an event, he was sure would not discourage his hon. friend in the cause in which he had embarked. And as to petitions, and the squeamish nicety which had appeared of late about receiving them unless penned in such and such language, he had no difficulty in saying the house would soon be compelled to receive them. He had no wish to say anything that should tend to bring the dignity of that house into question; on the contrary, he wished to see it supported. But, with regard to the present petition, his duty compelled him to say that if the petition was rejected it would not be because it was disrespectful in language, but because it told the truth.

*The house divided. For receiving the petition 29; against it 108.*

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MAY 3.

PETITIONS FOR PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

MR. SHERIDAN said he held in his hand a petition from a great number of respectable factors, merchants, manufacturers, &c. of the city of Glasgow, praying for a reform in the representation of the people in parliament. He did not know the exact number of persons who had signed the petition; but some idea of it might perhaps be formed by the house when he stated that, although the names were written very close, the petition was just fifty yards long. He then moved that the petition be brought up, upon which some members called out to him to read the petition.

Mr. Sheridan stated that he conceived, by the forms of the house, a member was not bound to do more, when he moved a petition should be brought up, than to state generally to the house what was the purport of it, and what the prayer of it was; and, if it respected a matter as to which the house had cognizance, and prayed a remedy which the house had power to grant, it ought to be brought up; nor could the member presenting it be called upon to read it. When it had been brought up, and came to be read by the clerk, if any improper or disrespectful expressions appeared in it, the house might then reject it instead of allowing it to lie upon the table. He said he believed this petition was ex-

pressed very nearly in the same terms as was a former petition from the same city, which the house had received ; but he must beg leave to decline reading it for no other reason than that he conceived what had been done last night, with respect to the Sheffield petition, was contrary to the forms and rules of the house ; and he wished the mode of proceeding to be brought back to the established custom.

*The petition was brought up, read, and ordered to lie on the table. Mr. Sheridan then brought up another petition to the same purpose from Dunleven, in the environs of Dumbartonshire, which was also read, and ordered to lie on the table.*

#### LIVERPOOL CREDIT BILL.

*The house went into a committee on this bill.*

Mr. Sheridan said he could not suffer this bill to go through the committee without making some remarks upon it. He declared he was in the habit of entertaining a jealousy of all corporations. They held their property in trust for the people of the town of which they formed the corporate body. In this case, they might completely dissipate the property of the people. It was likely they might not be very nice in favouring and playing into each other's hands.

*The bill passed the committee, and was ordered to be reported on the following day.*

#### COMMERCIAL CREDIT BILL.

*Mr. Pitt moved the order of the day for the house to resolve into a committee on the bill to direct the issue of exchequer bills for five millions, in aid of the commercial credit of this country.*

Mr. Sheridan said, that though he agreed to the principle of the bill, he could not help thinking that the house should deliberately consider how the relief provided by it should be administered to the commercial world. The variety of things to be done, the number of applications to be considered, characters examined, agents and clerks to be appointed, and other duties to be discharged by the commissioners, were so many bars in the way of their proceeding, that no calculation could be made of the time they must lose before they could effectually administer relief to the objects of the bill.

*The bill passed, and was ordered to be reported on the next day.*

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MAY 7.

## MR. GREY'S MOTION FOR A PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

Mr. Grey presented a petition, purporting to be the petition of certain persons whose names were thereunto subscribed, which was brought up and read by the clerk. The petition was of such length that the reading of it employed nearly half an hour. It stated, with great propriety and distinctness, the defects existing in the representation of the people. It took notice of the division of the representation, or the proportions in which the different counties contribute to the total number of the representation; showing, under that head, the absurd disproportion which takes place in a variety of instances, inasmuch that the county of Cornwall alone sends more members to parliament than the counties of York, Rutland, and Middlesex, put together. It proceeded to take notice of the distribution of the elective franchise, or the proportional number by which the different representatives are elected; stating, under that head, that a majority of the whole house of commons is elected by less than fifteen thousand persons; or, in other words, by the two-hundredth part of the people to be represented, supposing that they consist only of three millions of adults, &c. It went on to take notice of the right of voting, or the various restrictions and limitations under which the privilege of a vote for the choice of a representative is bestowed; stating the great evils and inequalities which prevail in that respect. It afterwards reviewed the qualifications to be possessed by candidates and those elected, and then considered the evils arising from the length of the duration of parliaments. It detailed the mode in which elections are conducted and decided; and, under that head, showed the evils arising from the length of time to which polls are protracted, from the influence of corporations, by the powers entrusted to returning officers, and from the appeal to the house of commons under the operations of the acts 10th, 11th, 25th, and 28th of Geo. III., as far as the same relate to expense and delay. The petition next noticed the mischief resulting from the defects and abuses which it had previously pointed out, particularly by the system of private patronage, and the influence possessed by peers and wealthy commoners in the nomination of what are called the representatives of the people; showing, under this head, that, by the patronage and influence of seventy-one peers and ninety-one commoners, the return of no fewer than three hundred and six members of that house was procured, which considerably exceeded a majority of the house. The petition dwelt at considerable length upon all the points already mentioned, and detailed a variety of other abuses, all which the petitioners offered to substantiate by proof; and it ended by stating the great necessity there was for the application of an immediate remedy, and the high importance of such a measure; and prayed the house to take the matter into their serious consideration, and to apply such remedy and redress to the evils complained of as should appear proper. Mr. Grey concluded a long speech by moving, "That the said petition be referred to the consideration of a committee."

MR. SHERIDAN said, that if the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) who had just sat down, thought it necessary to commence his speech with an apology to the house for troubling them at

that late hour, surely then it might be natural that he should also make an apology for introducing himself in the present stage of the debate. He was sure that the house, in any other circumstances than the present, might expect that apology; but on the present occasion he should not make an apology, for he would not pay the house so ill a compliment as to insinuate that the members of it were not ready to do their duty, which was to hear impartially all that could be said on either side of any question that came before them. The house had already heard, with patience and with attention, much observation on both sides; it was to their honour they had done so. He felt difficulties often when he had occasion to trouble the house; but upon this occasion he could not help thinking that he stood upon very advantageous ground. He knew the advantage which the right hon. gentleman had in that house, and that for many reasons he was more likely to be attended to than those who were to oppose him; few, if any, were heard within the walls of that house so attentively as that right hon. gentleman. But the task which devolved upon the person who had now the honour to address the house was great indeed. He knew that he and others of the same sentiments upon this subject, had to speak bold unwelcome truths, and such as would not be heard with pleasure; yet so deeply was he impressed with a sense of his duty, that, notwithstanding all these disadvantages, he should not shrink from the task, but would do all in his power to perform it, even in the present situation of the house. He could not be discouraged, although he knew the effect of the burgrage tenures, of which the petition complained. The petition stated, and he would repeat to that house, that many of the members could only properly be addressed as the representatives of a particular person, and not the people of England. This he and those with whom he acted ought to say to a great number of that house; men who were either sent there by the express interference of the crown, or by individuals, at the will of the executive government. They ought to say so, to be able to render an account to the public, whose agent and attorneys they were, in order to satisfy that public that they had not neglected their duty. They were not in any case to be discouraged from the discharge of their duty; for though they knew their numbers to be small, they yet were conscious their cause was good. The speech of the right hon. gentleman was an extraordinary



effort of his great, splendid talents—his noble and vigorous mind. He applied all his powers to this subject: he appealed with his utmost skill to the pride and the passions of the assembly. The right hon. gentleman was aware that he was addressing his auditors upon a subject that required all his art, and therefore it was that all the art he was master of was used. It was a topic very worthy of the highest art—that of convincing a great number of men that his conduct at this moment was not inconsistent, although perfectly different from his former professions. He thought, however, that the right hon. gentleman would have confined himself a little more to an explanation of the subject on which so much objection had been taken to his conduct; instead of this explanation, he had found out numberless auxiliary evasions. The right hon. gentleman now objected to his hon. friend's motion upon this subject: he objected to it because it was not specific, or because it did not contain a specific plan; and yet it was a little whimsical that this sort of objection should arise from that right hon. gentleman, who, himself, had made precisely the same proposition. But the right hon. gentleman told the house that he was now convinced of the impropriety of that measure: convinced of the impropriety? What was it that convinced him? Was he afraid that the proposal for a committee to inquire into the truth of any allegation of the corruption of parliament might be attended with success? What was he afraid of? Did he fear he should be obliged to carry a plan for parliamentary reform? He hoped the right hon. gentleman had some reasons for this change of his mind which were honourable to himself, although he had not divulged them. But the change of the right hon. gentleman's mind upon this part of the subject was still more inapplicable; for he said even now that he had not totally abandoned all thoughts of persisting in some measure for a parliamentary reform; and yet he seemed to say that he should never agree to any plan upon that subject that had not some specific remedy to a stated grievance. This was the more to be wondered at, when it was remembered that when that right hon. gentleman submitted one of his motions for a parliamentary reform with a specific remedy, he was negatived by a large majority. But when he moved it merely as a plan for a committee of inquiry, such as the present one was, he was resisted only by a majority of twenty in a full house. Whatever the right hon. gentleman might think

or might wish, Mr. Sheridan said, he, for his part, had no doubt but that a motion for a committee of inquiry was the most eligible plan that could be proposed upon this subject. This he said for many reasons; and one in particular, he could not help stating, which was the facility with which objections could be urged. Many persons who were in their hearts enemies to the whole system of any parliamentary reform, might yet, for the sake of concealing it, say, "If you had brought some other plan forward, I should have given it my support; but I am convinced this plan is an improper one;" and, therefore, there were always more enemies to a specific than a general plan. This, petition, therefore, in his opinion, was a proper one. It stated certain grievances which the petitioners were ready to prove at the bar of that house; and he knew not upon what principle of justice it was that the house could refuse entering into an inquiry. But there was said to be a great objection remaining to this petition, from the nature of its allegation as well as the prayer of it; for that it went to ask that which was against the principles of our constitution. Gentlemen had laid great stress upon what they had stated in that respect; which was, that the principles of our constitution, and the whole of the system of our representation, was select; and that a system of general representation would destroy the whole of the spirit of the constitution altogether, by which representation was not matter of right. Gentlemen, in making this observation, were confounding the means with the principle—the principle of our constitution was representation; the means were selection and distribution. To illustrate this, Mr. Sheridan read the preamble of an act of parliament passed in the reign of King James I., in which it was stated that the whole of the commons were present when the bill passed their house. This was always the principle of the constitution of this country. Another thing was stated as an objection to the petition, namely, that it went to the extent of asking for an universal representation. Nothing was easier than to say so, but that was not the fact; the petitioners did not claim the right of universal suffrage. But gentlemen urged, as another objection to the granting of the prayer of this petition, the danger which would attend it; and some went so far as to say that if there were a full and complete representation of the people in that house, there would be an end of the other two branches of the legislature; for that the power of the commons



would be so great that the king and the lords would be voted useless. Such observations he thought highly dangerous; and he must say he did not think that sentiments more mischievous than these were ever uttered within the walls of that house; and he was sure that if the representation of the people was complete to-morrow, the people of this country had too much good sense to instruct their representatives to do anything to affect the just prerogative of the king, or to diminish the privileges of the nobility. They would not suffer their agents to do anything of that nature, because they knew that if they did their own power would be in danger. He would repeat it, that the good sense of the people of this country would have their own interest in view; and that if the representation of the people in the house of commons was complete, the king would be firmer upon his throne than he was even at this moment. Another objection made by the right hon. gentleman was that which arose from the danger of transacting business, in this case, through the medium of delegates. How the right hon. gentleman had, on a sudden, formed such a dislike to delegates he did not know; but it reminded him of what had happened on a former occasion when this subject was under the direction of the right hon. gentleman himself; they had been delegates, and he (Mr. Sheridan) happened to know this, because he was one of the committee; and so far was it from being thought at that time an impropriety, that the right hon. gentleman determined on carrying on the business upon this very principle; and the Lord Mayor of London gave them the use of Guildhall to transact their business, and afforded them and the delegates all the encouragement he could to proceed upon the plan they had commenced; but now the word delegate seemed to be disagreeable to the right hon. gentleman. Indeed, Mr. Sheridan observed, that there seemed to him to be a great deal of insincerity in the conduct of the chancellor of the exchequer upon this subject. He should have told those who had now brought this matter forward that they were not to expect his assistance: this would have been infinitely more manly than his present vacillation. He wished the chancellor of the exchequer would either tell the friends of parliamentary reform *when* he thought he should lend them his assistance, or declare that he never would. He had proved he was of opinion that a season of permanent prosperity was not the time. He had proved too that a time of

war was not the time. Should they have the assistance of the right hon. gentleman after the war with France was over, or should we then be told that the French, being subdued, we should not suffer any alteration in our own constitution? He should either say at what time he should lend that assistance, or say that he was in the wrong when he brought the subject of parliamentary reform forward, and since that time he had seen his error, and therefore abandoned his principle. Mr. Sheridan said he had rather hear that the right hon. gentleman had abrogated it altogether, than find that he abandoned it only while he was minister, and that he should take it up again when he shall be out of power, because that would cast a shade upon the whole subject, and make the people of this country think there was nothing like honesty among those who professed attachment to the rights of the people; and the people might therefore despise all parties, and come to a determination of doing everything for themselves. Mr. Sheridan then observed that the right hon. gentleman had intimated that the people were not desirous of a parliamentary reform, and that only a few individuals had expressed that wish. Upon this occasion he referred to the speech of an hon. gentleman (Mr. Duncombe) early in this debate, and there it would be found that the hon. gentleman had said he believed in God that the prediction of the late Earl of Chatham would prove true, that a reform in parliament would be obtained before the end of the present century. It had been said that the measure proposed would be dangerous at the present moment, on account of the connection between France and this country. There could not be a more unfair argument than this, because nothing could be more different than the dispositions of the people of France and the people of this country. The one knew and had enjoyed for a long time a certain portion of liberty; the other had but just ousted their despotism; and therefore to refuse to inquire into this subject on that account was ridiculous. The right hon. gentleman had said much on the vigour of our constitution: he never should attempt, he said, to deny but that the vigour of our constitution produced wealth; on the contrary, he allowed that wealth rose out of the constitution; but if we persisted in not taking care to preserve that constitution by every means in our power, the very wealth it produced would be the means of its destruction; and the wealth which the constitution had been the



means of acquiring was the best reason why a reform should take place. Mr. Sheridan then took notice of the observation of a right hon. gentleman (Mr. Wyndham) who had spoken in a former debate on this subject. That right hon. gentleman, in the course of his speech, had said that he was opposing those who had a wish for a revolution in this country, and not a reform. He took some time to prove that they could not lay any stress upon the representation of this country as a principle. He saw that one petition contained more names than all the electors of this country who returned one half of the members of that house. This was certainly very alarming to those who agreed with the logic of that right hon. gentleman, because he maintained that the more numerous the petitioners were the greater was the chance of their being in the wrong; and yet again, after thus speaking against majorities, he proceeded to run down the minority. That right hon. gentleman had often been in a minority; but having lately had dealings chiefly with the majority, and consequently an excellent opportunity of showing his judgment by dividing with the minority, he had a better opportunity of knowing their error. Having descanted upon this point for some time, he turned again to a serious view of the subject, and observed, that there were but three ways of judging of any point; the first was, by reason and truth; the second was, by majority of the opinion of those who think on the subject; the third was force. If the first was sufficient, the other two would be unnecessary, and there would be no occasion for government; because if man was to be governed by reason and truth, he would be perfect; and, being perfect, it would not be necessary that he should be governed; but as man was a frail being, it was necessary that he should have some government, and therefore there remained but the other two for his choice. Now of these two he believed there was no difficulty in choosing; for as we all abhorred force, we came to the necessity of adopting the opinion of the majority of our fellow beings, and therefore the right hon. gentleman, in declaring himself in a state of permanent insurrection against the majority of the people, was not quite correct. As to the general challenge of proving the abuse which subsists in our government, Mr. Sheridan said, he had no delight in it; but as he must reply, some of the abuses of which he complained, and of which a reform of parliament was the only remedy, were, that peers of the other house sent members to the

house of commons by nomination ; that the crown sent members into that house by nomination too ; that some members of that house sent in members by their own nomination also—all these things made a farce of an election for the places for which these gentlemen were returned ; that men were created peers without having been of the least service to the public in any action of their lives, but merely on account of their parliamentary influence—the present minister had been the means of creating a hundred of them. He did not blame him, the fault was in the system of government ; that corruption was the pivot on which the whole of our public government affairs turned ; that the collection of taxes was under the management of wealthy men in parliamentary interest, the consequence of which was that the collection of them was neglected ; that, to make up the deficiency, excisemen must be added to the excise—this soured the temper of the people ; that neither in the church, the army, the navy, or any public office, was any appointment given, but what resulted of parliamentary influence ; and, consequently, corrupt majorities were at the will of the minister. He did not like to tell secrets of the prison house of the treasury ; but in the present instance he was called upon. In short, whether the eye was directed to the church, the law, the army, or to parliament, it could only observe the seeds of inevitable decay and ruin in the British constitution. He next animadverted upon the American war, its origin, and issue : there he maintained that delusion was practised under the pretence of taxation, but in the end this country had paid dearly for the experiment of ministers. He alluded to the proselytism which had been ascribed to the views of the French nation, and of which they now seemed themselves to be thoroughly ashamed, since similar doctrines had been carried into execution by the Empress of Russia and the King of Prussia, with regard to the unhappy partitioned kingdom of Poland. Mr. Sheridan concluded by stating that the object of reform, he and his colleagues had in view, would be persevered in until it was effectually accomplished.

*The house divided ; for referring the petition to a committee 41 ; against it 282.*





MAY 16.

## EAST INDIA ANNUITIES BILL.

*The report of this bill being brought up,*

MR. SHERIDAN contended that the holders of East India stock were, by equity and by the spirit of former acts of parliament, to be paid off in 1794, at the expiration of the present charter, at par, for that the public stood pledged to that effect. He wished that as this might be a question of law to be decided hereafter there should not, at least, any thing appear in this bill that tended to decide that question, or seem to determine anything upon it. With a view to keep the question open at least, Mr. Sheridan proposed a clause for that purpose.

*Mr. Pitt differed from the hon. gentleman in this respect; he was decidedly of opinion that the public were not indebted in any degree to these annuitants but to the company, and to whom the public were only collateral security.*

*The clause was negatived and the report was read, the resolutions agreed to, and the bill was ordered to be read a third time to-morrow, if then engrossed.*

MAY 17.

## BOARD OF AGRICULTURE.

Sir John Sinclair moved—"That an humble address be presented to his Majesty, entreating, that his Majesty would be graciously pleased to take into his royal consideration the advantages which might be derived by the public from the establishment of a board of agriculture and internal improvement: humbly representing to his Majesty, that though in some particular districts improved methods of cultivating the soil are practised, yet, that in the greatest part of these kingdoms the principles of agriculture are not yet sufficiently understood, nor are the implements of husbandry, or the stock of the farmer brought to that perfection of which they are capable: that his faithful commons are persuaded if such an institution was to take place, that such inquiries might be made into the internal state of the country, and a spirit of improvement so effectually encouraged, as must naturally tend to produce many important national benefits, the attainment of which his Majesty has ever shown a most gracious disposition to promote; and, in particular, that such a measure might be the means of uniting a judicious system of husbandry to the advantages of domestic manufacturing industry, and the benefits of foreign commerce, and consequently of establishing on the surest and best foundations the prosperity of his kingdoms: and, if his Majesty shall be graciously pleased to direct the institution of such a board, for a limited time, to assure his Majesty that his faithful commons will cheerfully defray any expense attending the same, to the amount of a sum not exceeding £3,000."

MR. SHERIDAN said, it was the first time he had heard of its being a circumstance of degradation to pay rewards: the two

following lines, which at present occurred to him, as applied to this country, expressed a very different sentiment—

Let people look, or let people say,  
It always looks great, to have something to pay.

In his opinion it was impossible to give a good reason why the public should pay the expense proposed. It was said the commissioners were to act without any reward; but, for his part, he was always extremely jealous when he found gentlemen too forward and zealous to do good to the public for nothing: upon that footing the board of control had been instituted. He had no objection to the principles of the motion, independently of the one he had mentioned, and would, therefore, conclude with moving, as an amendment to the address, to leave out the latter part of it, and to insert the following words,—“Provided that no expense whatever attending the same shall fall upon the public.”

*The amendment was negatived, and the motion carried.*

#### BILL FOR REGULATING THE GOVERNMENT OF TRADE

*The report of the committee of the whole house on this bill being brought up: on reading the clause to enable his Majesty to appoint two additional commissioners for the management of the affairs of India, who are not privy councillors and with certain fixed salaries, Mr. Fox opposed it. In the course of the debate it was stated that Mr. Dundas had not accepted the salary of the office of secretary of state.*

Mr. Sheridan said he should like to know to what fund the salary alluded to had been applied, but he did not believe he should have much information upon the subject; nor did he see any reason for congratulating the house on that part of the right hon. gentleman's speech which conveyed information that there was soon to be a successor to the right hon. gentleman in the office of secretary. As to the bill of his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox), to which allusion had been made, he must say that the conclusion which the right hon. gentleman wished to draw from it was wholly and entirely unwarrantable; for he meant to impress upon the house that the influence of this bill was of the same nature, but not to the same extent, as the bill of his right hon. friend. Perfectly the reverse was the case; and so the house must feel, when they reflected on the arguments made use of against the bill of his right hon. friend, when it was under discussion, for its opponents all exclaimed against it on account of the encroachments which it made on the power of the crown,



which were said to be so violent, that they almost took away the crown from the head of the sovereign; that, therefore, it could not be similar to this, for here the objections were to the increase of the power and to the influence of the crown. The question here put to the right hon. gentleman who brought in this bill was, upon what ground it was that he called upon the house to agree to a measure that tended to increase the influence of the crown, in the manner and to the extent of appointing these commissioners? Were there not a sufficient number of sinecure places already held by gentlemen, who ought to lend their assistance to government in carrying on the plan of the government of India, without creating new offices of high emolument, patronage, and influence? The right hon. gentleman had said, that young gentlemen should be appointed to those offices, educated, as it were, in Indian politics; and then again he was pleased to pay the house a compliment by denying its laziness, as he was pleased to term it, and saying that that house was never idle when it ought to be active. This compliment, he had no doubt, was well deserved, and the public would be of that opinion when they recollected that there never had been any difficulty in forming ballots, and that the public business had never been delayed on that or any other account; and that there had been one contested election unsettled for three years, for any complaint of that nature. It must, however, be confessed, that the right hon. gentleman had hit upon a very good method of improving the diligence of the young gentlemen whom he should appoint to the board, namely, that of giving them large salaries. This was certainly an excellent spur to their industry, at least until they got their appointments. He had contrived an excellent method of instructing them too; for the India House was to be turned into a sort of menagerie for instructing young gentlemen in the science of India politics. As to the reluctant manner in which the right hon. gentleman had accepted his various offices, he should only say, that if he found the tasks of them irksome, there ought to be something given to him to proceed in his duty on his foreign and home departments, if they were too laborious for him. The question, too, why gentlemen holding sinecures under government should bear part in the labour to be created under the present bill, was pretty well settled; for the young gentlemen to be employed might be taught in time at the India House;

—the seniors had taken care of the sinecures for themselves; and the reason why these young scholars in politics should have no sinecures was pretty obvious, for the seniors had got them already. If, for instance, it was asked why one of them should not be appointed clerk of the signet in Scotland? The answer was, that was already held by the treasurer of the navy; or why one of them should not be appointed to the office of the treasurer of the navy? The answer was, that was already held by the secretary of state; or why one of them should not be appointed warden of the Cinque Ports? The answer was, that was already held by the chancellor of the exchequer. The right hon. gentleman, however, was a little tender upon the subject of the youth of those commissioners when he came to consider the probability of their becoming privy councillors; possibly he might have been a little prompted upon that subject by his right hon. friend (the chancellor of the exchequer), who himself had the good fortune to be a privy-councillor before he was five-and-twenty, and a relation of his at the age of twenty-three. These seniors gave away all sinecure places first; left these junior politicians to be taught their trade before they should come in for a share; and then, with the gravity of Nestors, they turned round to the house, and said, "Let us, for God's sake, have no young privy councillors."

*The house divided; for the clause 113; against it 42.*

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MAY 24.

BILL FOR REGULATING THE GOVERNMENT AND TRADE OF  
INDIA.

*Mr. Dundas brought up a number of claims which were agreed to, and ordered to be added to the bill by way of clauses. He stated that there was no new matter in the clauses, but only certain provisions upon subjects on which there had been the fullest evidence on the table, and on subjects too which had been in the expectancy of the house.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that the evidence of this fact consisted solely in the assertion of the right hon. secretary; that the house was excluded from the possibility of investigation by his precipitant measures; that many of the clauses referred to subjects which were as novel as they were material; particularly that one which regarded Nootka Sound. The nation had expended, he said, four millions, in vindicating its right to this trade; and



yet, for his part, he never could discover either that such a trade now existed, or was likely to exist. But taking the bill and its clauses into view, he knew nothing that they resembled, unless it was a stage coach, in which the inside bore no proportion to the outside passengers.

*On the third reading of the bill, Mr. Fox said, that as he had given notice that he should again object to that part of the bill which went to the creation of new offices in the gift of the crown, in order that those with whom he had formerly concurred in a vote for reducing the influence of the crown might have an opportunity of delivering their sentiments on the proposed increase of that influence, he certainly should take the sense of the house upon it. If they still concurred with him in the opinions they had formerly professed, it became them, like men who acted from a sense of duty, unbiassed by any temporary motives, to maintain those opinions by their votes on the present occasion. If on the contrary their opinions had changed, if they had abandoned the principles upon which he and they had formerly combated the increasing influence of the crown, it became them in that case also, as men who acted from conviction, to avow that change, to explain the reasons of it, and to confirm it by their votes. In no case could he conceive it to be proper or consistent with their duty and their character to absent themselves, and leave persons who were less inclined to put a candid construction on their motives than he was, at liberty to suppose that they were either afraid to avow the change that had taken place in their opinions, or that if they still adhered to them, they were unwilling, on account of some peculiar circumstances at the present moment, to take that part which their duty required. Lord Inchiquin replied.*

Mr. Sheridan said, that with regard to the hon. gentlemen to whom his right hon. friend alluded, he must take it for granted that they were all absent for very good reasons, else they certainly would be in the house to do their duty. With regard to the right hon. gentleman to whom the noble lord alluded, the house, no doubt, would be satisfied to hear that his absence was not occasioned by ill health; of this he could assure the house, for that right hon. gentleman attended his public duty this day at another place, and that too on the affairs of India. But the complaint of his right hon. friend did not apply solely to that hon. gentleman, as he had himself already said there were others whom he had a right to expect to attend upon the discussion of this business. They had good reason, no doubt, for their absence, but until they were pleased to assign them, he must say that they had been unaccountably kept away from the house upon all occasions, when it was possible his right hon. friend should appeal to them on the vote they gave with him upon the influence of the crown. That they still maintained the opinion

they gave upon that subject, Mr. Sheridan said, he had no doubt; that the influence of the crown applied particularly to the affairs of India, and that these very gentlemen had the same sentiments upon that subject as they had expressed upon the declaratory bill of the right hon. gentleman (the chancellor of the exchequer). He had no doubt either that they then considered that bill as part of a system of fraud, tyranny, and oppression. He had no doubt that if these gentlemen were present on this evening, they would have the same feelings as they had then, and that they would repeat their expressions. But, however, although the majority of that house might have confidence in the integrity of these hon. absent gentlemen, yet the public had yet to learn the cause of their absence, and perhaps until they were satisfied of the cause of that absence, they might not be quite ready to take it for granted, that these gentlemen did their duty by absenting themselves upon the present occasion. However, when the apology came, there was no doubt it would be deemed sufficient by the public.

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MAY 28.

REVENUE BILLS.

*Mr. Rose moved for several revenue bills. Mr. Taylor objected on the ground that there was not time in the present session for the proper discussion of such important business. Mr. Rose answered, that the business now brought forward was not of the importance supposed, and would not require the discussion imagined.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that this mode of proceeding was highly improper, and he must say, that it appeared to him to attach blame to the conductors of it. Last year this very practice was complained of, and he understood the hon. gentleman to have been a little pledged to bring business forward early in future. With regard to the observation, that what was now to come on was not very important, and would not require much discussion, that, Mr. Sheridan said, was a point which the practice of the hon. gentleman prevented from being ascertained; for who could know, without an opportunity of judging, whether it was important or not? For this reason he should move, that these bills, and the clauses which might be offered on them, should be printed, that the house might have an opportunity of examining them properly. He was the more induced to do this, from recollecting the manner in which many measures had been passed, and



smuggled through the house, under the assurance of the hon. gentleman, that they were not important, which afterwards were discovered to be so important, that the house had been obliged to explain, alter, and amend them.

*Mr. Rose denied that he had caused any measure to be smuggled through the house ; with respect to the bills which were now before it, he had no objection to their being printed.*

PROCEEDINGS AGAINST MR. HASTINGS.

*Mr. Burke moved, " that the managers of the impeachment of Warren Hastings, Esq., do prepare and lay before the house a statement of the proceedings on the trial of the said impeachment, together with an account of the circumstances which have occurred in the course of the said trial, with such observations as may tend to the explanation of the same."*

*Mr. Long said a few words against taking up the time of the managers in this way.*

*Mr. Wigley moved the previous question.*

Mr. Sheridan defended the motion with great ability : he ridiculed the idea of there not being time for the purpose ; and observed, that the managers had several hands unemployed at this time, and indeed, that he was unemployed himself, and should be so with regard to this impeachment until the speeches and the evidence alluded to in the course of this day should be printed ; for he should not begin to think what he should say in reply before he knew what he was to reply to ; the arguments, and perhaps the tropes and figures of the learned council for the defendant might not require any extraordinary efforts ; but he must be acquainted with facts, and the application which they made of them. He could wish, for instance, to know what sort of a reply either of the hon. gentlemen would make, without reading it, to the speech of Mr. Plomer, which lasted four days. If they printed it, Mr. Sheridan said he certainly would read it, not because he was sure they had overturned the arguments of the learned council, or commented ably on three folio volumes, although they might think so ; but that such a reply must in its nature be a curious and entertaining performance.

Mr. Sheridan said, that if the house had any delicacy upon appointing the managers to make a report upon a subject which concerned themselves personally, that would be easily removed by appointing the same committee as that whose report the house had this day received. He maintained, that when the conduct of the managers was arraigned, the public ought to have a fair

statement of that conduct; there was nothing so necessary as a real statement of facts upon this subject. If, for instance, it was known by the public that the lords had met *de die in diem* the managers would have been ready to do so, and the whole of the trial would have been over in one session of parliament, instead of lasting, as it had, for six years. If these things were publicly known, they would have a good effect upon the public. If it was known that in the year 1791 the lords allowed only four days for this trial—in the preceding year only fourteen days—in the whole only eighteen days for two years, the public would form a right opinion whence the delay came; and that if the council for the defendant had taken twenty-two days for the defence, such facts would have the weight they ought to have upon the public mind. They would tend highly to make people ashamed of accusing the managers of any improper conduct upon this trial; he wished, indeed, those gentlemen who affected to blame the managers would state charges against them, because then they could be met and regularly refuted; but insinuations were vile where their authors would not come to a test of truth. Mr. Sheridan then alluded to certain words spoken by a high character in Westminster Hall upon this trial, that no man, except such persons as Marat and Robespierre could have conducted themselves as some of Mr. Hastings's accusers had done. If any man who breathed upon this earth was suffered to make such aspersions without being properly refuted, there was an end to the dignity of the commons of Great Britain. He was not to be answered that these were the words of privileged persons; no person ought to have such a privilege, and the higher the authority, the more intolerable the insult. The infamy of such assertions ought to be manifested to the public, that they might continue to esteem the character of the managers of this important prosecution, and have a proper reverence for public justice.

*The house divided on the previous question: ayes 69; noes 69. The speaker gave the casting vote against the previous question. The house then divided on Mr. Burke's motion. Ayes 67; noes 71.*

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JUNE 6.

## PROCEEDINGS AGAINST MR. HASTINGS.

Mr. Grey moved, " That a message be sent to the lords to acquaint them that the house of commons, having taken into consideration the state of the impeachment now pending against Warren Hastings, Esq., together with the advanced period of the session, are convinced that it will not only be impossible to obtain judgment on the several charges exhibited against the defendant, but that they cannot, without inconvenience, complete the reply under one of the separate heads thereof in the present session; and that by a reply the charges should not be broken, the whole of which the lords have considered as one clause, and that therefore the commons desire the lords to postpone the proceeding to the next session of parliament, when the commons will be ready and desirous to attend from day to day, if they think fit, to make good their charges."

Mr. Cawthorne opposed the motion as a measure of unnecessary delay: he thought that Mr. Grey would be well prepared at the day appointed for the reply, and he was happy to see his abilities improving every day.

MR. SHERIDAN said, he thought that the house had heard from the hon. gentleman who had just sat down, the best reason they could have for postponing the time for his hon. friend's reply—that his abilities were in a state of improvement from day to day; this was an admirable reason for a little delay upon this business; because, if that was true, he would be able to proceed with immense advantages to the cause at the beginning of the next session. But if the trial went on at all in the present session, the managers would be compelled to proceed without means for argument, and the lords must determine without knowledge; the one party proceeding without knowing anything of the evidence against the charge which they were to support, and the other deciding upon the evidence they had not heard, and arguments which they could not in that case understand. Mr. Sheridan argued with great force in favour of the motion, and maintained it to be impossible to do justice to the cause by coming to a reply in the present session. He maintained also that there was not the smallest colour for charging the ministers with delay, and concluded with observing, that he verily believed, that proceeding to a reply as the lords proposed upon the present occasion, would not be the means of hastening the conclusion of the trial a single hour.

*The house divided—ayes for the motion 61; noes 66.*

MR. COURTENAY'S MOTION, "THAT THERE BE LAID BEFORE THIS HOUSE THE RETURNS OF SMALL ARMS AND ARMY STORES THAT WERE AT THE TOWER ON THE FIRST OF JANUARY, 1781."

*Previous to this motion Mr. Burch had moved, "that a list of the necessary arms now in the Tower, be laid upon the table of this house." This was withdrawn under an understanding that it was to be renewed on the 12th.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, he thought there were strong grounds for inquiry. It had been stated by an hon. member, that several parties of the militia had applied for arms that they were not provided with, and that there were not sufficient arms to be had for them at the Tower. He did not think that this motion was of any great importance unless the other was revived. He had heard there was only a stand for between two and three thousand men; if so (but he did not pretend to know), there had been great negligence somewhere, particularly at a time when there had been created so serious an alarm about an internal insurrection in this country; but that there had been no real occasion for more arms was a proof of what he always thought, and often said, wanted no proof, that the whole of the cry of alarm was without foundation. He had no objection to this motion being put off to a future day, but he thought the other motion ought to be made also.

*The house divided—for the motion 10; against it 30.*

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JUNE 12.

LIBEL ON THE MANAGERS OF THE PROSECUTION OF MR. HASTINGS.

Mr. Whitbread moved, "that a paragraph in a paper called 'The World,' now read, contains reflections of a very gross and scandalous nature, and is a libel on the managers appointed by this house to conduct the impeachment now depending against Warren Hastings, Esq." The paragraph complained of was, "that the Archbishop of York had stated that it was impossible for him to sit silent and listen to the illiberal conduct of the managers; that they examined a witness as if he was not a witness but a pickpocket; and that if Marat or Robespierre was there, they would not conduct the impeachment in a more scandalous manner." The mode Mr. Whitbread proposed to adopt on this occasion, if his motion was agreed to, was to institute an inquiry in form, whether the words alluded to had been uttered, when, where, and by whom.

Mr. Dundas moved an adjournment.

MR. SHERIDAN said, he had heard several reasons urged,



which, if they had been stated to his hon. friend in the lobby before he came into the house, might perhaps have induced him to delay making the motion which he had done, but which could afford no argument whatever for slipping it over now that it had been brought forward. The chief argument seemed to be, that the matter would be forgotten, and would not go down to posterity; but the contrary of this was well known, and that in state trials everything that passed in the court was stated. That the words had come from such high authority was, of all others, the strongest reason why they should not be submitted to. Mr. Sheridan said, nothing could lead him to agree to any compromise upon the subject, except the argument of feeling; but he trusted the right hon. gentleman opposite to him (Mr. Dundas) would agree to withdraw his motion for adjournment, for otherwise how would the matter appear upon the journals of the house? His hon. friend had made a motion, that the passages alluded to were a scandalous libel upon the house; and if this motion was got rid of by adjournment, they would, in fact, stand branded by their journals. If the first motion of his hon. friend should be agreed to, it might be understood that no farther proceedings were to be founded on it.

*Mr. Dundas said he could have no objection to withdraw his motion, "that the house do now adjourn," in order to move, "that the debate be adjourned for a fortnight."*

Mr. Sheridan said, that he would certainly prefer a motion for adjourning the debate, but wished the right hon. gentleman to make his motion for adjourning the debate only till Monday next. If betwixt that time any proper mode of proceeding should occur to him, he would then bring forward another motion on the subject.

*The Speaker said, that no amendment could be made to the question of adjournment, which must therefore be first disposed of. The house divided—ayes 8; noes 60. Majority against withdrawing the motion 52. The house adjourned.*

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JANUARY 21, 1794.

ADDRESS ON THE KING'S SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF THE  
SESSION.

*His Majesty opened the session this day with the following speech:—*

*"My lords and gentlemen,*

*"The circumstances under which you are now assembled require your most serious attention. We are engaged in a contest, on the issue of which depends*

*the maintenance of our constitution, laws, and religion, and the security of all civil society. You must have observed, with satisfaction, the advantages which have been obtained by the arms of the allied powers, and the change which has taken place in the general situation of Europe since the commencement of the war. The United Provinces have been protected from invasion; the Austrian Netherlands have been recovered and maintained; and places of considerable importance have been acquired on the frontiers of France. The re-capture of Mentz, and the subsequent successes of the allied armies on the Rhine, have, notwithstanding the advantages recently obtained by the enemy in that quarter, proved highly beneficial to the common cause. Powerful efforts have been made by my allies in the south of Europe; the temporary possession of the town and port of Toulon has greatly distressed the operations of my enemies; and, in the circumstances attending the evacuation of that place, an important and decisive blow has been given to their naval power by the distinguished conduct, abilities, and spirit of my commanders, officers and forces, both by sea and land. The French have been driven from their possessions and fishery at Newfoundland, and important and valuable acquisitions have been made both in the East and West Indies. At sea our authority has been undisputed, and our commerce so effectually protected that the losses sustained have been inconsiderable in proportion to its extent and to the captures made on the contracted trade of the enemy. The circumstances by which the farther progress of the allies has been hitherto impeded, not only prove the necessity of vigour and perseverance on our part, but at the same time confirm the expectation of ultimate success. Our enemies have derived the means of temporary exertion, from a system which has enabled them to dispose arbitrarily of the lives and property of a numerous people, and which openly violates every restraint of justice, humanity, and religion; but these efforts, productive as they necessarily have been of internal discontent and confusion in France, have also tended rapidly to exhaust the natural and real strength of that country. Although I cannot but regret the necessary continuance of the war, I should ill consult the essential interests of my people if I were desirous of peace on any grounds but such as may provide for their permanent safety, and for the independence and security of Europe. The attainment of these ends is still obstructed by the prevalence of a system in France, equally incompatible with the happiness of that country and with the tranquillity of all other nations. Under this impression I thought proper to make a declaration of the views and principles by which I am guided. I have ordered a copy of this declaration to be laid before you, together with copies of several conventions and treaties with different powers, by which you will perceive how large a part of Europe is united in a cause of such general concern. I reflect with unspeakable satisfaction on the steady loyalty and firm attachment to the established constitution and government which, notwithstanding the continued efforts employed to mislead and seduce, have been so generally prevalent among all ranks of my people. These sentiments have been eminently manifested in the zeal and alacrity of the militia to provide for our internal defence, and in the distinguished bravery and spirit displayed on every occasion by my forces both by sea and land: they have maintained the lustre of the British name, and have shown themselves worthy of the blessings which it is the object of all my exertions to preserve.*



"Gentlemen of the house of commons,

"I have ordered the necessary estimates and accounts to be laid before you, and I am persuaded you will be ready to make such provision as the exigencies of the time may require. I feel too sensibly the repeated proofs which I have received of the affection of my subjects, not to lament the necessity of any additional burdens. It is, however, a great consolation to me to observe the favourable state of the revenue, and the complete success of the measure which was last year adopted for removing the embarrassments affecting commercial credit. Great as must be the extent of our exertions, I trust you will be enabled to provide for them in such a manner as to avoid any pressure which could be severely felt by my people.

"My lords and gentlemen,

"In all your deliberations you will undoubtedly bear in mind the true grounds and origin of the war. An attack was made on us and on our allies, founded on principles which tend to destroy all property, to subvert the laws and religion of every civilized nation, and to introduce universally that wild and destructive system of rapine, anarchy, and impiety, the effects of which, as they have already been manifested in France, furnish a dreadful but useful lesson to the present age and to posterity. It only remains for us to persevere in our united exertions: their discontinuance or relaxation could hardly procure even a short interval of delusive repose, and could never terminate in security or peace. Impressed with the necessity of defending all that is most dear to us, and relying, as we may with confidence, on the valour and resources of the nation, on the combined efforts of so large a part of Europe, and above all, on the incontestible justice of our cause, let us render our conduct a contrast to that of our enemies, and by cultivating and practising the principles of humanity and the duties of religion, endeavour to merit the continuance of the Divine favour and protection which have been so eminently experienced by these kingdoms."

The usual address of approbation was moved by Lord Clifden and seconded by Sir Peter Burrell. Lord Mornington, in a long and elaborate speech, exerted himself to prove that the principles adopted by the French rendered it indispensably necessary to continue the war till they had relinquished them.

MR. SHERIDAN began with observing, that the noble lord who had just sat down had divided a speech, more remarkable for its ability than its brevity, into two parts: the first, a detail of all the atrocities that had been committed during the whole course of the revolution in France; the second a kind of posthumous arraignment of the offences of Brissot and his associates. As he did not perceive any noble or learned member inclined to rise on behalf of the accused, so he conceived the pleadings on the part of the prosecution to be closed; and as the speaker was evidently not proceeding to sum up the evidence, he hoped he might be permitted to recall the attention of the house to the real object of that day's consideration. He admired the emphasis of the noble lord in reading his voluminous extracts from his various

French documents ; he admired too the ingenuity he had displayed in his observations upon those extracts ; but he could not help farther expressing his admiration, that the noble lord should have thought proper to have taken up so many hours in quoting passages in which not one word in ten was to the purpose ; and often where they did apply to the question, they directly overset the principles they were brought forward to support.

The noble lord's purpose was to prove, that France had begun the war with Great Britain ; this, he appeared to think, he had established the moment he had shown that Brissot and others had promulgated in print, a great many foolish, and a great many wicked general principles, mischievous to all established governments ; and this, indeed, had been the only way in which any one had ever endeavoured to fix the act of hostile aggression upon France. No part of the king's speech, it seems, more fully met the noble lord's approbation than that in which he had warned us to keep in sight the *real grounds and origin of the present war*. For his part, he knew not how to obey the call, for he knew not how to keep in sight that which had never yet been in his view. The *real grounds* of the war had never yet been explained, either to that house or to the nation, but shifting clouds had veiled them from the public eye. The noble lord, however, appears to have understood his Majesty's allusion ; he recollects the *real grounds* upon which the war was, in point of fact, undertaken ; that is, he knows the means by which we had been brought into this war ; we had been brought into it by repeated declamations on all that the frenzy, folly, and rashness of individuals in France had either said or written, by which the passions of this country had been roused, or their fears excited, in order to second the views of those who had determined to plunge us into it at all events ; therefore the noble lord, consistently enough, imagined that a repetition of the same means which induced us to commence hostilities, was the best method of persuading us to continue them. Hence all this passionate declamation, hence this laborious farrago of extracts and anecdotes—of extracts from a book which the noble lord allowed every one to have read ; and anecdotes of which no man who saw the newspapers could be ignorant. But what was the sum of all that he had told the house ? that great and dreadful enormities, at which the heart shuddered, and which not merely wounded every feeling



of humanity, but disgusted and sickened the soul, had been committed. All this was most true; but what did all this prove? What, but that eternal and unalterable truth which had always presented itself to his mind, in whatever way he had viewed the subject, namely, that a long-established despotism so far degraded and debased human nature, as to render its subjects, on the first recovery of their rights, unfit for the exercise of them; but never had he, or would he meet but with reprobation, that mode of argument which went, in fact, to establish, as an inference from this truth, that those who had been long slaves, ought therefore to remain so for ever! No; the lesson ought to be, he would again repeat, a tenfold horror of that despotic form of government which had so profaned and changed the nature of civilized man, and a still more jealous apprehension of any system tending to withhold the rights and liberties of our fellow-creatures. Such a form of government might be considered as twice cursed; while it existed, it was solely responsible for the miseries and calamities of its subjects; and should a day of retribution come, and the tyranny be destroyed, it was equally to be charged with all the enormities which the folly or frenzy of those who overturned it should commit.

But the madness of the French people was not confined to their proceedings within their own country; we, and all the powers of Europe, had to dread it. True; but was this also to be accounted for? Wild and unsettled as their state of mind necessarily was upon the events which had thrown such power so suddenly into their hands, the surrounding states had goaded them into a still more savage state of madness, fury, and desperation. We had unsettled their reason and then reviled their insanity; we drove them to the extremities that produced the evils we arraigned; we baited them like wild beasts, until at length we made them so. The conspiracy of Pilnitz, and the brutal threats of the royal abettors of that plot, against the rights of nations and of men, had, in truth, to answer for all the additional misery, horrors, and iniquity, which had since disgraced and incensed humanity. Such has been your conduct towards France, that you have created the passions which you persecute. You mark a nation to be cut off from the world; you covenant for their extermination; you swear to hunt them in their inmost recesses; you load them with every species of execration; and you now come

forth with whining declamations on the horror of their turning upon you with the fury which you inspired.

Sir, I should think it sufficient to answer thus generally to all the pathetic appeals to the passions, so constantly resorted to on this subject; but the noble lord, I am ready to admit, has, on the present occasion, endeavoured to ground more of argument, in one point of view, on the inflammatory passages and anecdotes he has quoted, than has been usual with those who have most practised this mode of treating the subject. I cannot, however, agree with the noble lord, that he has omitted any advantage to his case for the sake of saving our time. In going over the pamphlet of Brissot, he tells us, rather whimsically, that he passes over this passage, and runs over that, when all the while he specifically details what he declares he will scarcely touch upon. In fact, he has passed over nothing but the question; and now mark the purpose of all this; observe the important conclusion for which, he says himself, he has dwelt so long on these facts, and I admit it to be a great and a serious one. Laying aside all question of aggression on the part of France, or of necessity, on our part, to enter into the war—all this is done, it seems, to show the house that the system now adopted by the government of that country is so abhorrent to the feelings of human nature—so contrary to the instinctive love of harmony and of social order implanted in the heart of man—so ruinous to external force, as well as to internal peace, prosperity, and happiness, *that it cannot stand*. This is the conclusion which the noble lord wishes to draw from all the facts and opinions that he has detailed: I close with him: I will admit his facts. I will admit that the system now prevalent in France is all that he has called it: and what ought to be our conclusion with respect to such a government? What, but that we ought to leave to the natural workings of the discords which it is calculated to engender, the task of its overthrow: that if it will not stand of itself, it is not necessary for us to attack it. Without disputing any of his premises, for the present, I will grant the noble lord, not only his principle, but the foundation upon which he builds it. I agree with him, that it is contrary to the eternal and unalterable laws of nature, and to the decrees of the Maker of man and of nations, that a government founded on, and maintained by injustice, rapine, murder, and atheism, can have a fixed en-



duration or a permanent success ; that there are, self-sown in its own bosom, the seeds of its own inevitable dissolution. But if so, whence is our mission to become the destroying angel to guide and hasten the anger of the Deity ? Who calls on us to offer with more than mortal arrogance, the alliance of a mortal arm to the Omnipotent ? or to snatch the uplifted thunder from his hand, and point our erring aim at the devoted fabric which his original will has fated to fall and crumble in that ruin which it is not in the means of man to accelerate or prevent ? I accede to him the piety of his principle ; let him accede to me the justice of my conclusion ; or let him attend to experience, if not to reason, and must he not admit, that hitherto all the attempts of his apparently powerful, but certainly presumptuous crusade of vengeance, have appeared unfavoured by fortune and by Providence ; that they have hitherto had no other effect than to strengthen the powers—to whet the rapacity—to harden the heart—to inflame the fury, and to augment the crimes of that government, and that people, whom we have rashly sworn to subdue, to chastise, and to reform.

The noble lord appears to have been aware that the number of passages he has quoted from Brissot's book, and other publications, must be considered as having no other object than to excite the mirth or inflame the passions of the house, unless he had concluded by drawing some inference from them applicable to the real subject in discussion ; and this, at length, he has condescended to attempt, by affirming they all tended to prove that France not only must have been the aggressor, and England the attacked party, but that France is still the party desirous of continuing the war. But how have his quotations borne him out ? That Brissot and Robespierre, previous to the experiment on Brabant, equally wished to propagate principles of republicanism in every country of Europe. I will grant to him, if he pleases, the latter endeavoured to effect it by force in Brabant, while the former wished to accomplish it by reason, and the example of prosperity which he hoped France would afford. But what does all this prove, when the noble lord, in the very same breath, is obliged to confess that a short experience made both parties retract their opinion and practice ; and so far from boasting of having provoked a war with England upon such principles, or for such purposes, the strongest reproach that either faction

could throw upon the other was, in mutual accusation, of having been the cause of war with the only power in Europe with whom France was eager to continue at peace? On this head, says the noble lord, "Robespierre imputes it to Brissot—Brissot retorts it upon Robespierre; the Jacobins charge it upon the Girondists—the Girondists recriminate upon the Jacobins; the mountain thunders it upon the valley—and the valley re-echoes it back against the mountain;" all facts, tending to contradict the assertion which the noble lord professed to establish by them, and making still plainer, what, indeed, the whole conduct of France had made sufficiently manifest at the time, namely, that there was no one party, of whatever description, in that country, which was not earnest to avoid a rupture with this, nor any party which we may not at this moment reasonably believe to be inclined to put an end to hostilities.

The noble lord, however, thinks he has established a great deal, when he has proved that all parties in the convention were, at the same time, fond of the system of fraternizing, as it is called, or of making proselytes to the general principles of republicanism. It may be so; but it would not have been uncandid in the noble lord to have dated the origin of this system, and to have marked the provocation to it; nor unfair to have acknowledged that even this principle also has been since completely abandoned by all parties. If he refers to it as a motive for our entertaining a just jealousy of them, he ought to admit their abandonment of it as a ground for our abandoning that jealousy. If their professing such a doctrine was a provocation to hostility on our part, their retracting it is an opening to reconciliation. From the moment they solemnly disavowed all intention or disposition to interfere in the governments of other nations, why should not we have renounced any intention of interfering in their's? But instead of this, what has been our conduct? We continue to remind and reproach the French with their unjust and insolent conduct in respect to Brabant and Genoa; at the same time we ourselves, adopt and act upon the very principles they have abjured, or rather upon principles of still more extravagant insolence and injustice. Who did not reprobate the folly and profligacy of endeavouring to force upon the people of Brabant, French forms, French principles, and French creeds?—Of dragging them to the tree of liberty, and forcing



them to dance round its roots, or to hang upon its branches ! But what has been the conduct of Great Britain, so loud in the condemnation of such tyranny, under the mask of liberty ? What has been her conduct to Genoa — to Switzerland — to Tuscany ? and, as far as she dared, to Denmark and to Sweden ? For her insolence has been accompanied by its usual attendant meanness. Her injustice has been without magnanimity. She wished to embark the world in the confederacy against France, the moment she thought proper to join it. That neutrality, of which she herself boasted but a month before, became instantly a heinous crime in any other state of Europe—and how has she proceeded ? With those that are powerful, and whose assistance would have been important, she has only expostulated and prevaricated ; but in how little, as well as odious a light, has she appeared, when threatening and insulting those petty states whose least obedience to her tyrannic mandates might bring great peril on themselves, and whose utmost efforts could give but little aid to the allies ? The noble lord has, with a just indignation, execrated the *cruel* and *perfidious* conduct of the fraternizing French to the Brabanters ; but will he defend the fraternity of the *just* and *magnanimous* to these Genoese ?—Have we not adopted the very words, as well as spirit of democratic tyranny ? We say to the timid, helpless Genoese, “ you have no right to judge for yourselves ; we know what is best for you ;—you *must* and *shall* make a common cause with us ;—you must adopt *our* principles, *our* views, *our* hatreds, and *our* perils ;—you must tremble at dangers which do not threaten you, and resent injuries which have never been offered to you ;—you must shed your republican blood in the cause of royalty ;—in short, you must *fraternize* with us ;—you must be our *friends*, our *allies*. If you hesitate, we will beat your walls about your ears—slaughter your people, and leave your city in smoking ruins, as an example to other petty states of the magnanimity of the British arms, and of the justice and moderation of British counsels.” Oh, shame, sir ! let us never hear these fraternizing principles, formerly professed by France, quoted as a just provocation for attacking her, while we ourselves, with the most shameless inconsistency, are avowing them in every part of Europe, and practising them where we dare.

The noble lord, still pursuing his anecdotes and his argument,

that France must have been the aggressor, and that the war was a war of necessity on our part, next retails to us the conduct of Citizen Genet, her emissary to the United States of America. Here again I give the noble lord his facts, and again I declare him to be equally unfortunate in his conclusion. I admit every thing as he states it, with respect to Citizen Genet. I agree in condemning the impolitic outrages he practised against the government of America;—I reprobate the indecent insults he offered to General Washington;—I disapprove of his erection of Jacobin clubs in that country, his establishing consular tribunals for the judgment of prizes, &c. &c. But why has the noble lord overlooked the event of all these heinous and repeated provocations? *America remains neutral, prosperous, and at peace*; America, with a wisdom, prudence, and magnanimity which we have disdained, thrives at this moment in a state of envied tranquillity, and is hourly clearing the paths to unbounded opulence. America has monopolised the commerce and the advantages which we have abandoned. Oh turn your eyes to her; view her situation, her happiness, her content!—observe her trade and her manufactures adding daily to her general credit, to her private enjoyments, and to her public resources; her name and government rising above the nations of Europe with a simple, but commanding dignity, which wins at once the respect, the confidence, and the affection of the world. And is America degraded by this conduct and by this condition?—Has Washington debased himself by his temper and moderation?—Has he sunk his character, and made himself contemptible in the eyes of the high-spirited statesmen of Europe? Will the noble lord attempt to prove this? or will he abandon his instance and his argument? The conduct of the French, in sending such a missionary as Genet to America, is brought up by him as the strongest proof of the enmity of the French to the peace and existing governments of all nations, and of the necessity of all nations uniting against them; and the behaviour of Genet himself is stated as an outrage too gross for human patience to submit to: and yet, the *selfish* American senate, confiding in the good sense of their fellow-citizens, conscious of never having betrayed their trust, and looking only to the interests of the people they represented, found no cause for war or quarrel in the novelty or madness of French principles; and *mean* Washington felt no personal re-



sentment at insults which did not provoke, because they could not degrade him.

Such has been the event of two nations viewing the same circumstances in a different temper and with different sensations. Both had been equally insulted by this new presumptuous republic ; attempts had been equally made to spread the doctrines of that republic in the bosoms of both ; both were equally interested in the preservation of the principles of civil order and regular government : yet, owing to the different councils that directed these two nations, the Americans are, at this moment, the undismayed, undegraded, and unembarrassed spectators of the savage broils of Europe ; whilst we are engaged in a struggle, as we have been this day distinctly told by our ministers, not for our glory or prosperity, but for our actual existence as a nation.

The next part from Brissot's pamphlet, dwelt upon by the noble lord as a farther proof that the French had always intended to make war against us, was, that the minister Monge had promised, as early as October, to have thirty ships of the line at sea from Brest, in April, and fifty in July ; but this, it seems, was happily prevented by the vigorous measures of the British ministry ; and if our ministers had not taken the steps they did, the noble lord tells us, by the bye, they would have deserved to have been whipped as schoolboys, or hanged as traitors. And what were the vigorous exertions which these vigilant ministers made ? Forsooth, they stopped two corn ships in the river Thames, destined for France ; and this, it seems, totally defeated the equipment of these fifty ships of the line ! But here let me ask the noble lord how it came to pass, if our ministers had such intelligence as early as October, that no *naval preparations were commenced* on our part till the month of February ? for this fact has been admitted by him in another part of his speech ; and the lateness of our equipment has been pleaded by him with another view, forgetting that there cannot be a stronger charge brought against his friends, and that they do indeed deserve to be whipped as schoolboys, or hanged as traitors, if, after receiving intelligence of the French preparations so early as October, they neglected, as in fact they did, all precautions on the part of this country, excepting the notable and powerful expedient of plundering two neutral sloops of a few sacks of French corn !

However, laying aside the merit or demerit of our minister, no proof to the noble lord's purpose arises out of this threat of the minister Monge. The noble lord himself, confesses that no part of the promise was kept: it was, in fact, a natural gasconade of the French admiralty, at a time we were insulting them; and, that the execution of such an equipment was not attempted, is much stronger evidence of their not having intended to break with us, than their having made the boast, is of a contrary determination. But it is, unfortunately, the interest of the cause the noble lord is supporting, to refer, on all occasions, to words, rather than to facts.

The noble lord, still pursuing his authority, Brissot, quotes that author's recommendation to the English of a pamphlet of Condorcet's, addressed to our parliamentary reformers; who encourages us, it seems, to proceed to disregard numbers, assuring us (being well informed doubtless of our object) that "Revolutions must always be the work of the minority. The French revolution was accomplished by the minority!" Nay, according to Brissot, it was the work of no more than twenty men! Such is the exertion that arises from the confidence of those who look to spirit and energy alone for success, and not to numbers. If this be true, it certainly is a most ominous thing for the enemies of reform in England; for if it holds true of necessity, that the minority still prevails in national contests, it must be a consequence that the smaller the minority, the more certain must be the success. In what a dreadful situation then must the noble lord be, and all the alarmists! for never, surely, was the minority so small, so thin in number as the present. Conscious, however, that M. Condorcet was mistaken in our object, I am glad to find that we are terrible in proportion as we are few; I rejoice that the liberality of session, which has thinned our ranks, has only served to make us more formidable. The alarmists will hear this with new apprehensions; they will, no doubt, return to us with a view to diminish our force, and encumber us with their alliance in order to reduce us to insignificance. But what has the nonsense any French pamphleteer may have written, or the notions he may have formed of the views of parties in this country, to do with the question? or how can it be gravely urged as a proof of the determination of the French people to attack us?

The noble lord having gone through this part of his detail,



triumphantly asks, whether he has not established his point, and proved the *hostile mind* of France, and that the object of all her parties was *war with England*? To which I answer, that he has proved nothing like it, and that two-thirds of the instances he has adduced have a tendency to prove the contrary. But instead of diving, for their purposes, in the random words of their orators, in the more flighty controversies of their party writers, or even in the hasty and incoherent reports of their committees, let us look to acts and facts; let us examine fairly the *conduct* of Great Britain towards France, and of France towards Great Britain, from the 10th of August to the declaration of war. Here Mr. Sheridan enumerated the various circumstances which showed the growing inveteracy of Great Britain from the first of the revolution to the time of the king's death; the countenance given to the treaty of Pilnitz, the withdrawal of our minister from Paris, the seizure of French property in neutral vessels, the banishing of French subjects, the violation of the treaty of commerce, and finally, the dismissal of their ambassador; all of which he showed had been borne by the French with a submission which nothing but their desire of peace with this country could have produced, amidst the fury and pride which actuated their conduct towards all the rest of Europe. They solicited, they expostulated; they pressed for explanation and negotiation; and even after their ambassador had been driven from this country they sent a new negotiator; nor did the sincerity of their professions for *peace with us* depend on words alone; for, to preserve this object, they actually abstained from the invasion of Holland when within their grasp, when their arms appeared irresistible, and success inevitable. Every fact spoke aloud that we forced France into the quarrel. Which party first declaimed, "We are at war," is a matter of trivial and childish distinction; nor do I, in this place, mean to argue that Great Britain was wrong in so preferring a state of open war against France, and joining in the general confederacy against her; nay, I will for the present grant that it was a war of sound sense, policy, and justice, but still it was a war of choice on the part of Great Britain; and from that responsibility the minister never can, nor shall, disengage himself.

Embarked, however, as we are in the war, it must, no doubt, be a matter of astonishment to many gentlemen to find the advocates of ministers so eternally and earnestly labouring in proof of

France having been the aggressor, and of having chosen to make war on us. The prominent point for the present discussion seems rather, under the circumstances, to be, how we shall end the conflict, let who will have began it ; or, if peace cannot be had, how we shall prosecute the war with vigour and success. But the object of these gentlemen, in recurring to the other ground, is obvious. They will not hear of peace ; *they* do not wish for it ; and finding themselves feeble in argument to show that the country ought to be of their opinion, they endeavour to establish a belief that it is France who does not wish for peace with us ; and this they think they do establish by proving, or rather by asserting, that it was France who provoked the war. If the war commenced in self-defence and necessity on our part, self-defence and necessity must continue it. They would evade the question whether it is our interest to have peace, by arguing, that it is not in our power ; from this delusion it is of the utmost importance that the public mind should be rescued.

All the professed objects for which we went to war have been obtained ; our ally, Holland, is safe ; Brabant is recovered ; the ideas of adding to the extent of their own country, or of interfering in the government of others, but as measures of warfare and retaliation, have been distinctly and unequivocally disavowed by the present government of France ; and notwithstanding all their lofty boasts and insulting threats, which are, in truth, the mere retorts of passion to our wild declamations against them, there is no question but that they would be ready to treat with us, or with any of the allied powers, to-morrow, simply upon the principle of *being left to the exercise of their own will within their own boundaries*. Let the experiment be made : if they prefer and persist in war, then I will grant that the noble lord will have some reason to maintain that their minds were always disposed to that measure, and that war could not have been avoided on our part. But till then, I am astonished that the minister who sits near the noble lord does not feel it necessary to his own dignity to oppose, himself, this paltry argument of the act of aggression having come from them, instead of leaving that task to us, to whom, comparatively, the fact is indifferent. When he hears this called a war of necessity and defence, I wonder he does not feel ashamed of the meanness which it spreads over the whole of his cause, and the contradiction it diffuses among the greater part of



his arguments. Will he meet the matter fairly? Will he answer to this one question distinctly—If France had abstained from any act of aggression against Great Britain, and her ally, Holland, should we have remained inactive spectators of the last campaign, idle, apart, and listening to the fray, leaving the contest to Austria and Prussia, and whatever allies they could themselves have obtained? If he says this, mark the dilemma into which he brings himself, his supporters, and the nation. This war is called a war unlike all other wars that ever man was engaged in. It is a war, it seems, commenced on a different principle, and carried on for a different purpose from all other wars. It is a war in which the interests of individual nations is absorbed in the wider consideration of the interest of mankind. It is a war in which personal provocation is lost in the outrage offered generally to civilized man;—it is a war for the preservation of the possessions, the morals, and the religion of the world;—it is a war for the maintenance of human order and the existence of human society. Does he then mean to say that he would have sat still—that Great Britain would have sat still—with arms folded, and, reclining in luxurious ease on her commercial couch, have remained an unconcerned spectator of this mighty conflict, and left the cause of civil order, government, morality and religion, and its God, to take care of itself? or to owe its preservation to the mercenary exertions of German and Hungarian barbarians, provided only that France had not implicated Great Britain by a special offence, and *forced* us into this cause of divine and universal interest by the petty motive of a personal provocation? He will not tell us so; or, if he does, to answer a momentary purpose, will he hold the same language to our allies? Will he speak thus to the emperor? Will he speak thus to the King of Prussia? Will he tell them that we are not volunteers in this cause?—that we have no merit in having entered into it?—that we are in confederacy with them only to resent a separate insult offered to themselves; which redressed, our zeal in the cause, at least, if not our engagements to continue in the alliance, must cease? Or, if he would hold this language to those powers, will he repeat it to those lesser states whom we are hourly dragging into this perilous contest, upon the only plea by which such an act of tyrannical compulsion can be attempted to be palliated, namely, that a *personal ground of complaint* against the French

is not necessary to their enmity? but that as the league against that people is the cause of human nature itself, every country where human feelings exist has already received its provocation in the atrocities of this common enemy of human kind. But, why do I ask him whether he would hold this language to the emperor, or the King of Prussia? The King of Prussia, sir, at this moment tells you, even with a menacing tone, that it is your own war; he has demanded from you a subsidy and a loan; you have endeavoured to evade his demand by pleading the tenor of your treaty of defensive alliance with him, and that, as the party attacked, you are entitled to the whole of his exertions. He denies that you are the party attacked, though he applauds the principles upon which you are the aggressor; and is there another power in Europe to whom our government will venture to refer the decision of this question? If what I now state is not the fact, let me see the minister stand up and contradict me. If he cannot, let us no longer bear that a fallacy should be attempted to be imposed on the people of this country, which would be treated with scorn and indignation in every other corner of Europe. From this hour let him either abandon the narrow ground of this being a war of necessity, entered into for self-defence, or give up the lofty boast of its being a war of principle, undertaken for the cause of human nature.

Still, still, however, be the war a war of necessity or choice, of defence or of principle, peace must some time or other be looked to. True; but in the present state of France, first, it is contended that no means of negotiation can be found: and, secondly, that even if you negotiated and agreed, no security for the performance of the agreement is to be had. An hon. member behind the noble lord (Mr. Hawkins Browne) has given it as his opinion, that we, who recommend peace, ought to point out the means by which ministers may commence and carry on a negotiation. With submission, I should rather have thought it a fitter proceeding that those who embark a nation in war for a specific purpose, should be called on to point out the probable means of obtaining the end proposed; but no such thing. Ask them *what* their end is, or *how* it is to be obtained? the constant answer is, no matter; the war is a just war, and it is impossible to treat for peace; we know not even how to set about it; and with this answer we must be content to persevere in a pursuit which all experience



has proved to be ruinous, in order to attain an object which no man attempts to prove to be practicable. The noble lord, however, does not lay so much stress on the impossibility of our treating for peace under the present circumstances, as upon the improbability of such a peace being safe or permanent. What security can we have for the continuance of a peace made with such a government as that of France? The factions of to-day are supplanted by others to-morrow; the rulers of the hour pass in succession from the tribune to the scaffold; there is nothing permanent or stable in their system—granted. And what then are you waiting for before you will treat? Is it simply that you will have some person on the throne of France—some first magistrate with the name of KING, be his power what it may, before you will enter into any negotiation? I suspect that this feeling is obstinately rooted in the minds of some persons. It is not, however, avowed; on the contrary, our own proclamations declare, that though the re-establishment of monarchy in France would be a soothing and conciliatory circumstance, it is not an indispensable preliminary to the re-establishment of peace. What then is the desideratum? A stable and responsible system of government of some sort or other, that would give a *reasonable expectation of duration and security to peace when established*.

I ask, is any change which our arms may probably effect in France likely to produce such a government? The *form* of it we are not to prescribe. Where are the *men* we hope to see come forward? We commenced with reprobating and reviling La Fayette, Rochefoucault, and the whole party of reforming royalists. Brissot and the republicans of the 10th of August overthrew and destroyed that party. We may boast of having assisted Robespierre and Danton in the destruction of Brissot and those republicans. Robespierre and Danton now possess the lead. Are you waiting till such men as Hebert and Chaumette shall have destroyed Robespierre and Danton? Would such a change give you the stable responsibility and trust-worthy government you desire; or do you see any class of men still under them, which, in the revolution of enormities, gives you a fairer promise of your object? No man will hold out such an expectation. Whence then can arise the sort of government with whom you *would* condescend to treat? I affirm from only one possible source; from a general reformation in the public mind of France, founded on

a deep sense of their calamities, and a just abhorrence of their past crimes. Then will cease their bloody internal enmities; then will cease the selfish, factious contests of their leaders; then will cease their revolting system of plunder, rapine, and impiety; then, in other words, will be established their republic on the immortal and unconquerable principles of wisdom and of justice, which, without diminishing the invincible enthusiasm which even now animates their military exertions, will supply those exertions with copious and unperishable resources; and then truly we shall have no objection to acknowledge them as a nation and to treat with them. Admirable prudence! Consummate policy! Whilst the certain seeds of internal discord, weakness, and dissolution are sown among them, and are checked in their rank growth only by the counteraction of stronger feelings against the foreign enemies that surround them, we will not stoop to treat, because we cannot have *security* for the future; but if, fortunately, our perseverance in assailing them shall at length eradicate all that is vicious and ruinous in their internal system, strengthening, as at the same time it must, the energies and solidity of their government, then our pride will abate, respectful negotiation will follow, and a happy peace may be concluded—a happy peace, for the terms of which we must be left in future for ever at their mercy! This I contend to be, if not the object, the result of waiting for that stable, responsible, and trust-worthy government in France which the noble lord demands; unless, as I said before, the operative, though not the avowed motive for the war, is simply to establish a monarchy in that country, or perish in the attempt.

Leaving the origin and object of the war, our attention is next called to the great progress that has been made by the allies since we entered into the confederacy! Our *success* has been such, it seems, that we ought to proceed, be the object what it may. First, the noble lord asks, with a triumphant air, whether France is not in a much worse condition than at the beginning of the campaign? Unquestionably she is: she has lost some hundreds of thousands of lives and exhausted many millions of resource; and what is more, sir, all Europe is in a worse condition, for the same reason. But I demand an answer to a question more to the purpose, and in truth the only question which belongs to the argument. I ask if there is any one man in this



house, or out of it, who thinks *that the allies are nearer to the object they had in view, than they were at the beginning of the campaign?* Let this question be fairly and honestly answered before we madly goad this nation to new exertions, and load our fellow-subjects with new burdens. I meet the noble lord in his review of the state of the allies and of France at the commencement of the campaign, and at the present hour; but I enter into that review with the object I have stated before my eyes, and not to strike a balance on little petty successes which conduce nothing to the main purpose.

Previous to the ending of the last session of parliament, my right hon. friend (Mr. Fox) renewed, by a motion in this house, his exhortation to government to treat for peace. We had then achieved all the avowed purposes for which we went to war. Holland was safe,—the opening of the Scheldt out of the question,—the enemy was driven out of Brabant,—we had succeeded in the West Indies,—Tobago was taken,—and Lord Hood had sailed to the Mediterranean with a force sufficient to insure the superiority of the British flag in that quarter. Yet all these advantages, now so vauntingly enumerated, were then held as trifles; they were treated comparatively as insignificant matters; and nothing but some important, decisive blow against the common enemy, which the power of the allies in the ensuing campaign was certain to effect, could make it prudent to think of peace. What has that campaign produced? The surrender of Conde, Valenciennes, and Quesnoy; the re-possession of Mayence, and the partial destruction of the marine at Toulon. Compare this with our boasts, our exertions, and expectations, with what has been gained to the cause of France. First, the very corner-stone on which the hope of the most sanguine rested, was not (for they had before their eyes the experience of the Duke of Brunswick's former campaign) the vigour and probable impression of the invading arms; but the zeal, the numbers, and the fury of the royal party in France, then roused to action by their monarch's recent execution, and encouraged by the indignation and horror which that event appeared universally to excite. Where now is that royal party? Where is the hope which pointed to their banners? They rose indeed, and everything that courage, vengeance, and despair could dictate, they attempted. Long and fruitlessly they looked to the allies for

assistance; at length the voice and the flag of Britain cheered their hearts and roused their efforts; would, for the honour of Britain, we could bury the event in silent shame, and in the graves of the poor mangled victims of their own delusion and our professions! If there yet exists an eagerness for a royal crusade in England, will the British arms ever again insult the coasts of Brittany or Provence with the offer of their protection? If there yet remains the remnant of a royal party in France, will Toulon and Noirmoutier ever be forgotten? The great body of the French royalists is destroyed and annihilated, and with them the very strongest ground upon which we built our first expectations of success.

The next point most relied upon by the eager advocates for the war, was the state even of the republican parties in Paris. Two factions, equally anti-monarchical, but actuated by the most fell and deadly animosity towards each other, ruled, severed, and dispirited the French people. By the furious contests of the leaders of these parties, the attention of the nation was engrossed, their efforts were enfeebled, their exertions shackled, and their hopes dismayed. Observers in all parts looked for a speedy and open conflict between them; and it was confidently and reasonably expected that the event of that conflict would inevitably be a ferocious and extensive civil war. *This expectation* was among the foremost of the *resources* of the allies. What has happened? To the astonishment of the world, one of these parties, apparently the most feeble, has not merely subdued, but extinguished the other; subdued them almost without an effort, and extinguished them without even an attempt made to avenge them; whilst the conquering party appear from that hour to have possessed not only more power, more energy, and more confidence, than any of their predecessors since the revolution, but even a vigour and fascination of influence and authority unparalleled in the history of mankind. This reliance, therefore, though reckoned on at the commencement of the campaign as a host of hope, is also gone.

Again, we were told, that the disgusting system of cashiering and destroying all the old-experienced officers, must create insubordination and mutiny in the army, and ultimately bring down the vengeance and indignation of the soldiers upon the convention, and establish a military tyranny. Here again has ordinary



speculation been foiled. The most victorious and popular generals have been arrested at the head of their troops; a commissioner from the convention tells the armed line that it is his will:—and, incredible as it may appear, there has scarcely been a single instance, countless almost as the number of their troops is, and compulsory as is the mode by which many of those numbers are gained—there scarcely has been a single instance of a military revolt against any of their decrees. All argument, therefore, that armies must in their nature disdain the control of such an assembly must, however reluctantly, be given up, and to that fallacious expectation we can look no more.

But the means even of supporting these armies, we were told, could not continue through half the campaign. Arms, ammunition, clothing, money, bread, all would speedily fail. The prediction, unfortunately—has failed in every particular. But if our negative resources and our hopes of co-operation in France have all disappointed us, I presume we shall find a full compensation in the increased strength and spirit of the grand alliance. Let us see what was the state of the allies when we entered into the confederacy? The force of Austria unbroken, though compelled to abandon Brabant; and the power of the veteran troops of Prussia absolutely untried, though the seasons and disease had induced them to retire from Champagne. What is their state now? Defeat has thinned their ranks, and disgrace has broken their spirit. They have been driven across the Rhine by French recruits, like sheep before a lion's whelp; and that, not from the mishap of a single great action lost, but after a succession of bloody contests of unprecedented fury and obstinacy. Where now is the scientific confidence with which we were taught to regard the efforts of discipline and experience when opposed to an untrained multitude and unpractised generals? The jargon of professional pedantry is mute, and the plain sense of man is left to its own course. But have the efforts of our other allies made amends for the misfortunes of these two principals in the confederacy? Have the valour and activity of the Dutch by land and sea exceeded our expectations? Has the Portuguese squadron lessened the extent and lightened the expense of our naval exertions. Have the Indian states whom we have bribed or bullied into our cause, made any very sensible impression upon the common enemy? Has our great ally, the Empress of

Russia, hitherto contributed anything to the common cause, except her praises and her prayers? Are all or any of them in better spirits to act, or fuller of resource to act effectually, than they were at the commencement of the last campaign? But let me throw all these considerations aside, every one of which, however, would singly outweigh the whole of the advantages placed in the opposite scale as gained by the allies; and let me ask, is it nothing that the great and momentous experiment has been made, and that a single nation, roused by a new and animating energy, and defending what they conceive to be their liberty, has proved itself to be a match for the enmity and the arms of the world? Is the pride which success in such a conflict has given to the individual heart of every man who has shared in it, to be estimated as nothing? Are the triumphs and rewards which the politic prodigality of their government heaps on the meanest of their ranks who suffer or distinguish themselves in their battles, fruitless and of no effect? Or, finally, are we to hold as a matter of slight consideration, the daring and enthusiastic spirit, solicitous of danger and fearless of death, which, gradually kindled by all these circumstances, has now spread with electrical rapidity among such a race of people, so placed, so provided, and so provoked? Be he who he may that has reflected on all these circumstances, either singly or in the aggregate, and shall still say that the allies are at this moment nearer the attainment of their professed object than at the commencement of the last campaign, I say that man's mind is either clouded by passion, corrupted by interest, or that his intellects were never properly framed.

The noble lord, however, though not inclined to overrate the enemy, seems to have been aware that he might be driven to admit the magnitude of their exertions, and that it would be difficult to deny the efficacy of them. But that we may not be dispirited, he has a solution ready for all this; both their *exertions* and their *success* are *forced* and *unnatural*. Another hon. gentleman indeed has told us, that if we had had only the *real* resources and the *real* spirit of France to contend with, we should have conquered them long ago. It may be so; but the worst of it is, they will not suffer us to prescribe to them the sort of spirit and the kind of resources we should choose to contend with. This may be very unhandsome; but there is no



remedy for it. "They have, it is true, a great force," says the noble lord, "but it has not a *sound* foundation. They have a full public treasury, but their prosperity is *unsound*. The people obey the government, but the ground of their submission is *unsound*;" in short, he takes great pains to prove to us, that they ought not in reason or nature to make the stand they have hitherto maintained; and that they have no right to beat their enemies in the manner which they have. Their government, he undertakes to demonstrate, is not calculated to produce any such effects. It reminds me of the story of a tradesman who had a very admirable time-piece made by a person who had never learned the business, and neither knew it mechanically nor scientifically. A neighbouring clockmaker, exasperated at this intrusion of natural genius, took great pains to convince the owner that he ought to turn his clock out of doors. It was in vain that the man assured him that it went and struck truly; that he wound it up like other clocks; and that it told him the hour of the day precisely. The artist replied, "that all this might be very true, but that he could demonstrate that it had no right to go like other clocks, for it was not made upon *sound principles*." The contest ended in his cajoling the poor man to part with his time-piece and to buy from him, at three times the cost, a clock that did not answer half as well. I wish the noble lord would attempt to make a similar impression upon the French, and could prevail upon *them* to listen to him. I wish he could convince them that this revolutionary movement of their's, which, however unskilfully and unmethodically put together, appears so strangely to answer their purpose, is an unworthy jumble of ignorance and chance; and that they would be much better off if they would take a regular constitution of his choosing. If he could effect this, I should think his rhetoric well employed, and our chance of succeeding against them infinitely increased, otherwise his arguments and demonstrations on the subject here, are the idlest waste of breath possible. Experience and facts contradict him, and we smart under them.

In corroboration of his general position, the noble lord next details to us the manner in which they have either neglected or oppressed their commerce. I have no doubt but that all he has stated on this subject is true, and that they have done it possibly upon system. I should not be surprised to hear that some dis-

tinguished senator in that country, with a mind at once heated and contracted by brooding over one topic of alarm, had started up in the convention, and exclaimed, "perish our commerce, live our constitution,"—neither should I be surprised to learn that the mass of the people, bowing to his authority, or worked on by fictitious alarms and fabricated rumours of plots, seditions, and insurrections, should have improved upon this patriotic exhortation, and agreeing that their constitution was certainly to be preferred to their commerce, should have conceived that they could not thoroughly show the fervour of their zeal for the former, so well as by an unnecessary sacrifice of the latter. Whether the hint of this notable axiom was taken from the expressions of any enlightened member of our own commercial senate, or whether it was imported into this house from France, is what I cannot take upon me to decide. The only result worth our consideration is, that however their neglect of commerce may have abridged them of the luxuries and even comforts of life, it has not hitherto curtailed them in the means of military preparations, or slackened the sinews of war.

The next proof of the *unsoundness* of their condition is to be looked for in the enormous taxes and contributions levied upon the people. The noble lord has summed up his laborious statements upon this subject, by informing us that every man of £400 a year is obliged to give up £220 of it to the public; in which case the noble lord, with great arithmetical accuracy, assures us that he retains but £180 for himself (the only conclusion throughout his speech in which I implicitly agree with him), and people of greater incomes, it seems, are called on to do the same. Now again I give the noble lord his facts, but again I accompany my assent with a plain question—*do the people submit to make these sacrifices?* He has not attempted to dispute their universal acquiescence. What then do his facts prove? What, but that so devoted are the whole people of France to the cause which they have espoused; so determined are they to maintain the struggle in which they have engaged; so paramount and domineering is the enthusiastic spirit of liberty in their bosoms; so insignificant, comparatively, all other pursuits and considerations; and, finally, so bitter and active their animosity against the conspiring powers which surround them, that individual property has ceased to be regarded, even by the possessor,



but as subsidiary to the public cause; and the government which has demanded these unprecedented sacrifices yet retains its power, and does not appear to have impaired its popularity.

“This system of exaction is *tremendous*,” says the noble lord; it is so, but to whom? to those who have to fight with such a people. He ought, however, in fairness, to have stated also, that these sacrifices and these exactions are to expire when peace has closed the struggle in which alone they originate, and the end is attained for which alone they are tolerated: till then, unquestionably, the whole country of France is regarded as one great fortress in a state of siege. To tell us how little respect is paid to private property, commercial principle, or personal privilege in such a state, is to prattle childishly; prove to us that the iron hand of violence and necessity, which has barred the course of justice and beat down all the security of private right throughout that besieged land, does not at the same time assist the one great object which is dearest to the general heart—successful resistance to the besiegers.

The noble lord, however, not content with the unfairness of overlooking all the circumstances which imperious necessity must inevitably impose upon a country circumstanced as France is, thinks it fair and candid to contrast the proceedings of their convention on the subject of supply and finance, with the proceedings of the British minister and of the British parliament! *We*, it seems, assist commerce instead of oppressing it. *We* lend the credit of the public exchequer to our private merchants: and, for the means of carrying on the war, not even voluntary contributions are expected, unless it be in little female keepsakes for the army, of gloves, mittens, night-caps and under-waistcoats. Certainly the contrast between the French means of supply and ours is obvious, and long may it continue so. But the noble lord pursues his triumph on this subject too far; not content with simply alluding to it, which one would have imagined would have answered all his purposes, he endeavours to impress it more forcibly on our minds by making a regular speech for our chancellor of the exchequer, and exultingly demanding what we should say, if his right hon. friend (Mr. Pitt) were to come down and propose to the British parliament such ways and means as the minister of finance in France is compelled to resort to? What should we think if he were to rise and propose that all persons who had money

or property, in an unproductive state, should lend it without interest to the public? If he were to propose that all who had saved incomes from the bounty of the state should refund what they had received? What, finally, if all persons possessing fortunes of any size were called upon to give up the whole during the war, and reserve to themselves only the means of subsistence, or, at the utmost, £180 a year? Upon my word, sir, I agree with the noble lord, that if his right hon. friend was to come down to us with any such proposition, he would not long retain his present situation. And with such a consequence inevitable, he need not remind us that there is no great danger of our chancellor of the exchequer making any such experiment, any more than of the most zealous supporters of the war, in this country, vying in their contributions with the abettors of republicanism in that. I can more easily fancy another sort of speech for our prudent minister. I can more easily conceive him modestly comparing himself and his own measures with the character and conduct of his rival, and saying—"Do I demand of you, wealthy citizens, to lend your hoards to government without interest? On the contrary, when I shall come to propose a loan, there is not a man of you to whom I shall not hold out at least a job in every part of the subscription, and an usurious profit upon every pound you devote to the necessities of your country. Do I demand of you, my fellow-placemen and brother pensioners, that you should sacrifice any part of your stipends to the public exigency? on the contrary, am I not daily increasing your emoluments and your numbers, in proportion as the country becomes unable to provide for you? Do I require of you, my latest and most zealous proselytes, of you who have come over to me for the special purpose of supporting the war—a war on the success of which you solemnly protest that the salvation of Britain, and of civil society itself, depend—do I require of you that you should make a temporary sacrifice in the cause of human nature of the greater part of your private incomes? No, gentlemen, I scorn to take advantage of the eagerness of your zeal, and to prove that I think the sincerity of your zeal and attachment to me needs no such test, I will make your interest co-operate with your principle; I will quarter many of you on the public supply, instead of calling on you to contribute to it, and while their whole thoughts are absorbed in patriotic apprehensions for their country, I will dextrously force upon



others the favourite objects of the vanity or ambition of their lives."

Sir, I perceive that the house feel that I have made a speech more in character for the right hon. gentleman than the noble lord did; that I have supposed him simply to describe what he has been actually doing; but I am much mistaken if they do not, at the same time, think it rather indiscreet in the noble lord to have reminded us of such circumstances. Good God, sir, that he should have thought it prudent to have forced this contrast upon our attention! that he should triumphantly remind us of every thing that shame should have withheld, and caution would have buried in oblivion! Will those who stood forth with a parade of disinterested patriotism, and vaunted of the *sacrifices* they had made, and the *exposed situation* they had chosen, in order the better to oppose the friends of Brissot in England—will they thank the noble lord for reminding us how soon these lofty professions dwindled into little jobbing pursuits for followers and dependents, as unfit to fill the offices procured for them, as the offices themselves were unfit to be created? Will the train of newly-titled alarmists, of supernumerary negotiators, of pensioned paymasters, agents and commissaries, thank him for remarking to us how profitable their panic has been to themselves, and how expensive to their country? What a contrast, indeed, do we exhibit? What! in such an hour as this, at a moment pregnant with the national fate, when, pressing as the exigency may be, the hard task of squeezing the money from the pockets of an impoverished people, from the toil, the drudgery of the shivering poor, must make the most practised collector's heart ache while he tears it from them. Can it be that people of high rank, and professing high principles, that *they* or *their families* should seek to thrive on the spoils of misery, and fatten on the meals wrested from industrious poverty? Can it be that this should be the case with the very persons who state the *unprecedented peril of the country* as the *sole* cause of their being found in the ministerial ranks? The constitution is in danger, religion is in danger, the very existence of the nation itself is endangered; all personal and party considerations ought to vanish; the war must be supported by every possible exertion and by every possible sacrifice; the people must not murmur at their burdens, it is for their salvation—their all is at stake. The time is come when all honest and

disinterested men should rally round the throne as round a standard;—for what, ye honest and disinterested men? To receive for your own private emolument a portion of those very taxes which they themselves wring from the people, on the pretence of saving them from the poverty and distress which you say the enemy would inflict, but which you take care no enemy shall be able to aggravate. Oh! shame! shame! is this a time for selfish intrigues and the little dirty traffic for lucre and emolument? Does it suit the honour of a gentleman to ask at such a moment? Does it become the honesty of a minister to grant? Is it intended to confirm the pernicious doctrine so industriously propagated by many, that all public men are impostors, and that every politician has his price? Or even where there is no principle in the bosom, why does not prudence hint to the mercenary and the vain to abstain a while, at least, and wait the fitting of the times? Improvident impatience! Nay, even from those who seem to have no direct object of office or profit, what is the language which their actions speak? “The throne is in danger! we will support the throne; but let us share the smiles of royalty.” “The order of nobility is in danger! I will fight for nobility,” says the viscount, “but my zeal would be greater if I were made an earl.” “Rouse all the marquis within me,” exclaims the earl, “and the peerage never turned forth a more undaunted champion in its cause than I shall prove.” “Stain my green riband blue,” cries out the illustrious knight, “and the fountain of honour will have a fast and faithful servant.” What are the people to think of our sincerity? What credit are they to give to our professions? Is this system to be persevered in? Is there nothing that whispers to that right hon. gentleman that the crisis is too big, that the times are too gigantic, to be ruled by the little hackneyed and everyday means of ordinary corruption? Or are we to believe that he has within himself a conscious feeling, that disqualifies him from rebuking the ill-timed selfishness of his new allies? Just previous, indeed, to the measure which bespoke the pre-determination of our government for war, he deigned himself to accept a large sinecure place; even *he*, who at the commencement of his political career lamented that he had fallen on times too good, too uncorrupt, to mark with effect the contrast of his own political disinterestedness, took to himself, at the period I mention, a great sinecure office, swelled by an additional pension, and



both for life : the circumstances have never been commented on in parliament, though perhaps there are those who do not exactly think his public service overpaid by the remuneration. But if the acceptance of such a boon, at such a time, is to be regarded by him as a pledge and contract, that he is never in future to consider himself entitled to an unpurchased support on the subject of this war, or to resist the mercenary claims of any proselyte which his arguments or his example may create—inauspicious, indeed, was the moment in which his own disinterestedness was surprised by the bounty of his sovereign, and far more lamentable to his country the consequences of that gift, than advantageous to himself.

Can we too seriously reflect, that in the contest in which we are engaged we have avowedly staked the being of the British empire? This *Bellum Internicinium*, as it was rashly named by those who advised, and into which I fear it has been more rashly converted, by those who have conducted it, is to be prosecuted at every risk. If we fail, we fall ; so circumstanced, the hour *may* come in which we may be compelled to look for a loftier spirit, a firmer energy, and a more enthusiastic attachment to the frame and form of our constitution, than ever yet has been demanded by our government from the people governed. Let the minister take care, if such an hour *should* come, that we do not look in vain. Let him take care that the corruptions of the government shall not have lost it the public heart ; that the example of selfishness in the few has not extinguished public spirit in the many. Let him not be too confident that his informers, his associations, his threats, his proclamations, or prosecutions, have driven from their post, or silenced the observations of those who honestly and lawfully watch the conduct of the *king's servants* in their stations, and of *their own servants* in this house, and who hold a corrupt collusion between them to be in itself an overthrow of the constitution. If we would have the people ready with one will, should the trying necessity arise, to risk and to sacrifice everything for the safety of the constitution and the independence of their country, let the high example come from those in high situations, and let it be as manifest as the danger, that no part of their subsistence has been wrung from them on a specious pretence, and applied, in fact, to increase the wages of corruption or swell the price of political apostacy.

But if neither public interest nor political prudence sway the mind of the right hon. gentleman, I wonder that a feeling of personal pride has not, in some measure, deterred him from the selection he has made of the late objects of his patronage, his favour, and his confidence. What a compliment has he paid to all his former connections and attachments! and in what a light has he held out their pretensions and abilities to the world! possessing opportunity and sagacity to discern and estimate the claims of worth and talents, he has long been in a situation to attach to himself a numerous body of respectable friends, whose fortunate concurrence in his opinion has been both steady and uniform. Could he not find amongst them any persons fit for the many situations of trust and emolument which he has lately created, or worthy the honours which he has recently advised his forgiving sovereign to bestow? No, it seems that *from this side of the house alone* the country could be properly served, or the favours of the crown duly repaid!

(Mr. Sheridan here recapitulated, and remarked on a number of favours, offices, and appointments, all bestowed on gentlemen lately in opposition; among these he was supposed to allude to Lord Loughborough, Lord Carlisle, Lord Porchester, Lord Hertford, Lord Malmsbury, Lord Yarmouth, Sir Peter Burrell, Sir Gilbert Elliot, Mr. Sylvester Douglas, Mr. Anstruther, Mr. John Erskine, &c. &c).

Was there ever, let me ask, a greater triumph than the list I have run through presents to those who yet remain on this side of the house, and who yet feel for the original credit of the party which these gentlemen have quitted—of that coalition party which has been so long and so vehemently traduced, both for its principles and its origin? Can it be that this execrable faction which, in the year 1784, was accused by the very man who then was, and still is minister, by all his adherents, and, through their arts even by the country at large, of the most rooted malignity to the constitution of this kingdom, of endeavouring to enslave the house of commons, to disgrace the house of lords, to make a cypher of the king, and to introduce a fourth estate. which was to throw the power and patronage of the whole empire into their hands and make their tyranny immortal—that this same party, who, at the time of the regency, were again accused, under the same authority, of being actuated by an insatiate love of office



and emolument alone, and of basely preferring the views of their own selfish and rapacious ambition to every sentiment of loyalty, to the first privileges of the commons, and even to the internal peace of the country—can it be that this arraigned, proscribed, and reprobated party, so characterized and stigmatized by the right hon. gentleman and his followers, should have contained all the while within its ranks the only men who, when the trying hour of proof arrived, were fit to maintain the vigour of the constitution, assert the honour of the peerage, and prop the pillars of the throne? Oh! if this be so, what a lesson ought it to be to those who listen to the venal libels and calumnies of a ministerial press! What a warning to their credulity in future, when they recollect that these very gentlemen, to whom principally, it seems, the country is indebted for the detection of all the plots, conspiracies, and insurrections which so lately threatened the overthrow of the state, as well as for that salutary preventive against all future ills of the present war, that these very personages were not only never excepted in the outrageous libels which so long assailed the party to which they so lately belonged, but were many of them the marked and principal objects of their venom and malignity! Trusting that such a lesson will arise from reflecting on this fact, I quit the subject; adding only, that I should much regret the being supposed to impute any sinister or improper motives to the conduct of any of these gentlemen, or by any means to deny, that the emoluments and honours they have received were other than the consequence of their conversion to superior wisdom and integrity by the present minister, and in no respect the allurements to that conversion; but still, sir, I must take the freedom to observe, that in order to have prevented a doubt, in these mistrustful times, arising in the public mind upon the subject, from the odd concurrence of circumstances, and considering the pressure and magnitude of the plea, on which alone they have justified their separation from former and long-cherished connections, it would have been better both for their own credit, and as an example to the people, to have rendered it impossible even for malice to suggest any other inducement for the part they took, than a strong sense of public duty, and a clear and disinterested apprehension for the general safety.

His Majesty laments the burdens that are to be laid on his  
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people, and yet ministers, lavish in courting, nay purchasing deserters by the most shameful prostitution of the national treasure, I take it for granted, have been forced thus to look to the other side, because the nursery for statesmen, formed by the secretary of state opposite to them, has not yet reared a sufficient number of plants for the necessary consumption; I dare say, that though our Chiron is slow in his march, he will improve as he goes on; and perhaps this year we shall be called upon for an additional sum of money to turn the nursery into a hot-bed. It is said, that if we were desirous of making peace we have not the means. With whom do we treat? I answer, with the men that have the power of the French government in their hands. I never will disdain to treat with those on whom I make war; and surely no wise nation ought to persevere in the idle disdain of a negotiation with those that are a match for them in war. A right hon. gentleman opposite said, that what made him first think of a negotiation with America, was his looking at General Washington's army; he had looked at it on the right, on the left, on the centre, and, according to his curious phrase, he could not accommodate himself anywhere. The same was surely true of France; we had tried it on all sides; on the south at Toulon, on the west by the Rhine, on the north by Flanders, on the East by our spying-glasses, at St. Malo, and we could nowhere be accommodated. But I see, notwithstanding our fatal experiment, we are doomed to go on; the fatal determination is taken, and there is no rational hope that the good sense and spirit of this house will reverse the decree.

Mr. Sheridan proceeded to a review of the proceedings of the campaign, to show that government had not displayed a single exertion becoming the dignity of the nation, or calculated either to maintain the splendour of our name and arms, or to accomplish the object of the war. There had been great misconduct on the part of those who had the power of directing our forces. No one vigorous exertion of prudence or wisdom had been made; however, fortune, in some respects, had been favourable to us. We fortunately escaped hostilities with America: the risk, however, of such an event, was hereafter to be inquired into. For what purpose, he asked, was a large fleet kept in the Mediterranean after the capture of Toulon, while we wanted its assistance in other parts of the world—whilst a French frigate



rode triumphant along the coast of America? And after the engagement between this and an English frigate, in which our gallant captain (Courtenay) lost his life, what must have been the feelings of the crew to find that no vengeance has been taken for his death?

Mr. Sheridan showed that even in the points of our attack, particularly at Toulon, Dunkirk, &c. &c. we had seen nothing but incapacity and blunder in the execution, as well as disaster in the event. These things must be the subject of parliamentary investigation. It was not enough that our precipitate retreat from Dunkirk was hushed-up and compromised between the master-general of the ordnance and first lord of the admiralty, because one of them was brother to the minister. And with respect to the transactions of Toulon, without stopping to inquire whether the destruction of the ships was consistent with the laws of war, he would demand by whose orders the constitution of 1789 was first offered to the people, and by whose orders that offer was broken to them; and it must be a subject of inquiry how the noble Lord Hood, who had so freely taxed General O'Hara with not keeping his word, had himself broken his word to the nation, about the strength and resistance of the place. The execution of the plan for the destruction of the ships, he would prove, was mismanaged in all that depended on the part of Lord Hood; for, at the Babel council of the combined armies, an offer was made to undertake the destruction of these ships, which appears to have been accepted; and yet such an inadequate force was given for the purpose, as to oblige Sir Sidney Smith to leave fifteen ships of the line unconsumed. He reproached them also for the expedition of Earl Moira, which was talked of so long as to deliver over all the unhappy royalists on the coast to massacre. The expedition of Sir Charles Grey had been equally ruined by protraction; and with respect to the whole of our naval campaign, it was in vain to enter into the details; for no man could assert with truth that we had anywhere presented a formidable aspect to the enemy. Of the conduct of the channel fleet he would not say one word; he was sure that the noble admiral had exerted his utmost talents in the service, though they all knew the industrious pains that had been taken to throw unmerited reproach upon him. That our trade had not been protected, the fact of the channel being now, or very

lately, at the mercy of a few French frigates, was a most glaring proof.

He thought it a duty he owed his constituents to inquire into all these things, that it might appear what our objects were in pursuing the present war, and what were the objects of our allies. From some late transactions, it was very evident that our worthy allies had objects very different from what this country could possibly be supposed to have in view. He said, that he did not mean to propose any amendment; he should be inclined to support, however, any amendment that went to declare that this house ought to treat for a peace whenever an opportunity for that purpose presented itself.

*Mr. Fox moved an amendment to the address, "to recommend to his Majesty to treat, as speedily as possible, for a peace with France upon safe and advantageous terms, without any reference to the nature or form of the government that might exist in that country." The house divided—for the address without the amendment 277; against it 59.*

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JANUARY 27.

## HESSIAN TROOPS AND MINISTERIAL JOBS.

*Mr. Dundas presented the following message from his Majesty:—"George R. His Majesty thinks it proper to acquaint the house of commons, that a corps of Hessian troops, taken into the pay of Great Britain to be employed on foreign service, having been brought to the appointed place of rendezvous off the Isle of Wight, his Majesty has found it necessary, with a view to the preventing any sickness taking place among the said troops from their continuance on board of the transports, to order them to be disembarked, and to be stationed for the present on the Isle of Wight, at Portsmouth, and at places adjacent. G. R."*

MR. SHERIDAN asked, if those were the troops destined for the expedition against France under the Earl of Moira?

Mr. Sheridan gave notice, that on Wednesday next he would move for several papers containing the estimate of commissions since the war, or ministerial jobs as they were called, for the purpose of founding a serious accusation against his Majesty's ministers.

*The Speaker acquainted him that Wednesdays were appropriated to the public business of the supplies, in the same manner as during the last session.*

*Mr. Pitt thought it would be fairer if Mr. Sheridan had stated his evidence in the charge before he mentioned the application.*

Mr. Sheridan confessed, that he had not yet made up his mind as to the quantity of papers he should move for, though



he fancied there could be no obstacle to their production. But as the minister seemed sore at the mention of the word "jobs," he would point out, among other things, the staff for Toulon, the staff for Lord Moira's expedition, and would, perhaps, have occasion to remark upon those very Hessians who had already invaded England before they proceeded to the invasion of France!

*Mr. Fox said, that as many of the required papers may be included in the army estimates, it would be proper to defer the motion till they were upon the table.*

*The Speaker observed, that this would probably be produced, according to custom, at an early hour to-morrow morning.*

Mr. Sheridan agreed, in that case, to make his motion to-morrow.

*Mr. Pitt could not help remarking on the modesty of Mr. Sheridan, who, though he could not make up his own mind as to the papers he intended to move for, thought it extremely reasonable that he should at once decide on the propriety of their production.*

*The house adjourned.*

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JANUARY 28.

MR. SHERIDAN'S MOTION FOR PAPERS CONTAINING THE ESTIMATE OF COMMISSIONS SINCE THE WAR, FOR THE PURPOSE OF FORMING A CHARGE AGAINST MINISTERS.

MR. SHERIDAN rose, he said, in pursuance of notice he gave yesterday, and in compliance with the impatience which the chancellor of the exchequer manifested, or seemed to manifest, to hear his motion, upon which he apprehended there could be no discussion, since from the temper of the right hon. gentleman, as it appeared when the notice was given, he could not help agreeing to what would be moved to-day. For, as it was the first duty of that house to inquire into the application of the public money; so it was the interest of every minister, supposing him to be fair in his conduct and clear in his accounts, to permit the inquiry, and at no time in the history of this country was inquiry more necessary than at present. We had heard, in the speech of the sovereign, information of the most important nature to the people of this country. Very soon the chancellor of the exchequer would have to bring forward his budget—that would be an awful and trying day; he feared it would then appear that the surplus of the revenue which had been so much boasted of, and the application of it for the re-

duction of our debt, whatever be the merit of the plan, would all at once be swept away, and with it would vanish that pleasing prospect of alleviating the hardships of the people by a reduction of the taxes. All that cheering hope, too, of reducing our peace establishment, as well as the reduction of our debt, and the alleviation of our burthens, which had, year after year been held out to us, and which, year after year we had waited for in vain would vanish; for if peace was concluded to-morrow, a vast number of years must pass away before we could even hope to be in the same situation as at the commencement of the war. Then we must say, it was the first duty of that house to take care not one sixpence should be idly squandered by the minister, nor anything done which would diminish one morsel of the meal of the labourer and his distressed family; or that anything should be permitted that tended to wring from the poor any part of their pittance. Yesterday he made use of the word "job," as applicable to some part of the minister's conduct with respect to appointments to certain offices under government, since the commencement of the war. The minister, in his simplicity and innocence, seemed not to comprehend what a job was. It was certainly not a very elegant, but it was a very intelligible term; but if the right hon. gentleman wanted an explanation of it, he should give one. Whenever any emolument, profit, salary, honour, or favour of any kind whatever was conferred on any person, be he who he may, or his character what it may, unless he has gone through a public service or necessary public duty, adequate to what he receives, that is a job: if from any private friendship, personal attachment, or any other view than the interest of the public, any person is appointed to any office in the public service, when any other person is known to be fitter for the employment, that is a job; and that, among other things, made him submit this motion to the house. They should not altogether refer him to the army extraordinaries; for although there was a good deal of information to be had from them, yet there was not enough. It was painful to him, in the course of his observations, to be compelled to enumerate persons for whom he had a personal respect; but his duty commanded him to do so: the situation of Sir Gilbert Elliot at Toulon, for instance, £1,500 a year; of John Erskine, £1,300; and the cases of many others. Perhaps the chancellor of the exchequer would be able



to prove all this was well earned and that the public ought to pay it; but that was matter for discussion on a future day. He then read his resolutions, the substance of which were,—

“An account of the expenses incurred by the employment of counsel, &c. relative to the affairs of India, in assisting and advising the board of control, from the date of the board down to the present time.

“An account of the salary now enjoyed by John Anstruther, Esq., as counsel for the board.

“An account of the half-pay, or pension, or emolument in lieu of half-pay, to John Erskine Esq., for his services at Toulon, &c.

“An account in the same way, to Joseph Dornford, Esq., for his intended expedition to the coast of France.

“An account of the salary, emolument, half-pay, &c., to Sir Gilbert Elliot, for his services at Toulon, &c.

“An account of the expense in consequence of the mission of Lord Yarmouth to the King of Prussia, &c.

“An account of the salary of Lord Malmsbury for his late mission, &c.”

Mr. Sheridan then said he had a few more which he should be obliged to add to this list, but he could not move them to-day.

*The question on the first motion was put and carried. On putting the second, Mr. Anstruther said he had no salary from the board of control; this motion was then withdrawn: others were put and carried. On reading that relating to Lord Yarmouth, his lordship stated he had received nothing for having acted in the character of envoy-extraordinary to his Prussian Majesty excepting his real expenditure.*

Mr. Sheridan said he entertained an opinion, before he had made his motion, that the Earl of Yarmouth had received no salary; and he wished the other gentlemen had followed so laudable an example.

*Mr. Fox observed, he was as much convinced before this motion was made as he was then, that the noble earl received nothing: but if his hon. friend had not moved with respect to him, his Majesty's ministers might have said, “why have you passed by the Earl of Yarmouth? Why have you made an exception to him?”*

*Mr. Burke admitted it was the duty of the house to watch the public purse with an anxious eye, but thought some evidences of guilt should ever precede suspicion, which was evidently not the case in the instance of Lord Yarmouth and Mr. Anstruther: and that the best way of preserving the effect of public inquiry was, not to exert it on slight or ill-founded occasions. He observed too, that Mr. Sheri-*

dan's profession of good will towards the individuals concerned, and distinction between the jobber and the jobbed were not strictly defensible; as the man who took on him a corrupt place was as bad as he who corruptly bestowed it. He meant not to condemn the inquisitorial functions of the house; but he thought a trivial and vexatious jealousy as pernicious as languor and negligence.

Mr. Sheridan repeated his assertion of good will towards the individuals concerned.

Mr. Pitt said, "*Will the hon. gentleman now persevere in his assertion, that he is only influenced by motives of good will towards the individuals concerned in bringing forward his motions? and if he does, can he imagine that any member in this house will credit it?*"

Mr. Sheridan was rising to reply, when

Mr. Fox prevented him, declaring, that in his opinion, founded on experience, Mr. Sheridan had as much personal credit in that house as Mr. Pitt.

Mr. Sheridan said, he was glad he had been prevented rising on the first impression Mr. Pitt's question had made on him, as he might perhaps, in the warmth of the moment, have said something unpalatable. "Whether," said he, "if I repeat my assertion, any member of this house will doubt it or not, I cannot be certain; but I believe it is in this house alone that the right hon. gentleman will venture to tell me so."

Mr. Stanley reprobated personalities; he thought so serious a question ought to be debated with its proper and consistent dignity.

Mr. Yorke thought it was hard for the members of that house, sent up from the country to mind the business of their constituents, to be obliged to listen to such nonsense, for such it certainly was, compared to the more important business of the nation.

Mr. Sheridan then added the following motion:—

"That there be laid before the house an account of the application and expenditure of the sums of £5,000 and £11,000, which, by an act of the last session of parliament, were occasioned to be expended for the board of control."

*This was put and carried.*

#### JANUARY 29.

#### NAVAL POWER FOR 1794.

*The house having resolved itself into a committee, the following resolution was read, "That it is the opinion of this committee that 85,000 men be granted to his Majesty for the sea service for the year 1794, including 12,115 marines."*

MR. SHERIDAN said he should, as his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox) had done, decline giving any opposition to the resolution before the committee. He wished to make a few observations,



in which he should endeavour to be as concise as possible. With regard to the capture of Toulon, he was apprehensive that it would be the greatest curse this country ever experienced; for he did not doubt but the French, who were suffering their navy to decline, would be roused thereby, and the capture of Toulon would become the regeneration of the French fleet; and should they execute their threats by sea, in the same manner they had done by land, he feared we should not have a great deal to boast of in the next naval campaign. He had heard much of the negotiations for the surrender of Toulon; but by what had fallen from the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) the Toulonese were induced to surrender by famine, not by loyalty;—by necessity, not by choice. One assertion made by the right hon. secretary of state (Mr. Dundas) was, that Halifax, in Nova Scotia, was in a respectable state of defence. He had a letter, which he produced, and which he said came from authority on which he could depend, stating the place to be in the most wretched condition. He read the letter, which was dated the 7th of December, 1793.—“ It stated the distressed state of the inhabitants from the want of a proper naval force; that every ship which had sailed from thence for some time past had fallen into the hands of the enemy; that the *Ambuscade* French frigate had been permitted to scour the coast, and had fitted out several of her prizes as armed vessels to cruize against the trade; that Admiral Soufflet, with three ships of the line, had been on that coast—that it had been his intention to take St. Peter’s and Cape Breton, and winter at Louisbourg, and pay them a visit in the spring, and then he could meet no opposition, their whole force consisting in two companies of artillery, two of foot, three hundred raw recruits, and one small ship of war;—that the peace establishment of the settlement was to be one fifty-gun ship, three frigates, and two ships of war; four regiments of foot, and three of artillery; that the people of that country were as loyal subjects as any his Majesty had, but could not but complain of being so neglected. They had understood there was a force in the West Indies, and were surprized no assistance had been sent them.” These were the circumstances stated in the letter which he had received, and which directly contradicted what had been advanced by the secretary of state.

Mr. Sheridan said, the exertions of the governor and the

loyalty of the inhabitants, had produced the three hundred unserviceable recruits mentioned in his letter. The plan of the enemy was not to attack it in the winter, but in the spring, before any additional force could be sent to it.

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JANUARY 31.

NAVAL FORCE FOR 1794.

*The resolution of the 29th was read a first time and the question put for the second reading. Mr. Dundas lamented his absence when Mr. Sheridan attacked him on the 29th, for what he had stated respecting convoys, and the ample protection afforded to the trade, &c. &c.*

MR. SHERIDAN remarked, though Mr. Dundas could not venture himself in the chill air of the house, he was happy to learn his indisposition had not prevented him from discharging his official duty in another place. He said, whether the right hon. secretary chose the land or sea for the scene of action, he appeared equally invincible and triumphant; that, stimulated by his courage and capacity, now he flourished the truncheon—now he wielded the trident; and all mankind must fall prostrate before him, acknowledging his superior prowess.

In the plenitude of his generosity, not thinking the hon. admiral sufficiently able to protect himself in the ocean of politics, he took him under his convoy and resolved to bring him safely into port. He then stated, that as to the letter which he had produced the former evening, he knew of no right the hon. gentleman had to pronounce it anonymous, merely because, whatever confidence he had in the authenticity of its contents, it appeared to him improper to give the name of the author. He maintained that nothing had come out in the course of the debate which took, in the smallest degree, from the weight which he thought that letter entitled to. He contrasted the boasting and lofty manner in which two right hon. gentlemen defended the conduct of the admiralty on the subject of convoys, with the plain, manly, and candid defence of the hon. admiral (Gordon). He contended that, from the letters produced by the right hon. gentleman, there were no fortifications, nor was that colony in any adequate state of defence previous to the 27th of August. He remarked, after commenting upon the letters dated 10th and 11th of October, that the last letter which the right hon. secretary agreed to have received, was dated the 9th of November. Now, he begged that



gentleman would recollect the letter he had produced was dated the 7th of December, and wished to know really, if ministers had received no letters since ; if so, from what cause that proceeded ? Notwithstanding the pompous account of nine thousand militia, he had no better opinion of the force in Nova Scotia than he formerly stated. The right hon. gentleman had stated that four thousand of them were collected in Halifax merely on an emergency ; and after all the compliments heaped upon them, said, that still they had their exercise to learn, being, as they were described, freeholders and merchants. He must allow, in one sense of the word, they were good men, particularly as giving security to return the arms. He contended that nothing had been advanced either that night or formerly, which convinced his mind, or could convince the country, his former statement was not completely true ; he would, therefore, re-state it, that during the whole campaign there was not in Nova Scotia any naval strength, nor any force on land, adequate to the defence of that colony in the event of its being attacked ; and he averred that out of doors, in Lloyd's, and at the Royal Exchange, if any inquiry was made where the best information could be obtained, it would be found the unanimous opinion that the trade and commerce of this country had not met with that protection which it ought to have done from the admiralty. One or two gentlemen, indeed, had spoken a different opinion in that house respecting particular branches of trade, but none of them could give what they said, as the general sense of the London merchants. One hon. member had taken a curious way to prove the efficacy of the protection given to our trade by the admiralty, when he stated the sums that had been made by underwriting in the course of last year. Now the fair inference to be drawn from this was exactly the reverse ; and it became a censure upon the party that it was intended to panegyris, because nothing could be more true than that in proportion to the greatness of the risk the advance of premium rose ; and thus all the double premiums which had been gained were occasioned by the inadequacy of the protection by convoys which our trade had received. He was surprised to hear gentlemen compare our situation at the commencement of the American war, with our situation at the beginning of the present war. Then we had to contend with so many and with such great powers ; now we had all Europe as our allies against one power. Even our good ally

Russia, upon this occasion, has bound herself by solemn treaties never to lay down her arms till Great Britain had made peace; though, by the way, from some unaccountable forgetfulness, she never has yet taken them up. As to what had been said of our captures at sea, he believed it would be found that France had taken as many ships from us as we have taken from them.

*Capt. Berkley recommended gentlemen who spoke on the opposition side of the house to study nautical matters before they attempted to speak on maritime affairs.*

Mr. Sheridan apprehended that the hon. captain who had just spoken had deviated from the propriety of debate, in presuming that no gentleman was qualified to speak on the question but those who sat at his side of the house. He appealed to several naval gentlemen near him, conversant in naval affairs, if there was not a shameful deficiency on the part of those entrusted with the protection of our trade. Though not in office, he apprehended that they were not less qualified to give an opinion on the subject. Ministers, he observed, had come down this day with voluminous documents, to overpower every argument that went to prove the neglect that exposed the trade to the capture of the enemy. If, continued Mr. Sheridan, there were any listeners to our debates, how humiliating to administration to have it said, that those gentlemen who opposed the measures of government called for an inquiry on a subject, to which its supporters declared, that the friends of government were alone competent to decide. If this was the case, they may have a complete triumph in exposing the weakness of those gentlemen with whom he had the honour to agree.

*The resolution was read a second and third time, and ordered to be reported on the following day.*

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FEBRUARY 21.

DEFENSIVE STATE OF HALIFAX.

MR. SHERIDAN rose, he said, in consequence of his notice to bring under the consideration of the house the defensive state of Halifax. To those who, like him, condemned the principles of the war, there were, in his opinion, two duties of equal importance. First, to endeavour, by every exertion in their power, to prevent the war. Secondly, when that was impossible, to watch, with the same exertion, the application of the supplies which were granted to carry it on.



If they could not prevent the war, they were bound to look to the faithful application of the funds by which it was to be prosecuted, and to take care that the object which it professed to follow was obtained.

Agreeably to this second point of duty, he now brought forward the subject of his present motion—an inquiry into the defensive state of a very important colony liable to be attacked by the enemy.

Relative to the inquiries of this house, Mr. Pitt had lately advanced, he said, two doctrines of a very extraordinary nature. His first was, that during war there was great danger in inquiry. His second, that those who proposed the inquiry should make up their minds between the certain evil of inquiry and the probable benefit of the result.

As to the first, Mr. Sheridan said, it tended to destroy the inquisitorial functions of the house, and to abate all salutary vigilance and animadversion. It followed also, that the greater the danger of the country from the folly and incapacity of ministers, the stronger would their argument be, that when inspections and deliberation became most necessary it would be most improper. He allowed, however, that it was a very convenient doctrine for ministers, who would thus find their own security and indemnification from the excess of their negligence and incapacity.

The second principle, though obviously aiming at candour, came under a peculiar degree of suspicion when it proceeded from those whose particular interest it was to render all inquiry as difficult as possible; and that suspicion was much increased when it was recollected that he, who at present in his ministerial capacity asserted the principle, when in opposition, was most prodigal in the use of the privilege he now meant to curtail. It was fresh in memory how jealous he was of this privilege when he first sat in the house, and what frequent use he made of it in his opposition to the American war. The conduct of the admiralty at that time he severely scrutinized, particularly relating to the affairs of Dogger Bank, and the fleet off Ushant.

If no other good resulted from the inquiry than the maintenance of its general principle, this of itself would amply compensate; it was a principle acknowledged in the general practice of the navy, that when a ship is taken the commander is always brought to a court-martial, though no suspicion is entertained of

his gallantry, or though his conduct may be known to be highly meritorious. It may be said Halifax is not lost; but though the case is not parallel in that particular, it is to be remembered that the naval inquiry only preserves in many instances the principle of inquiry.

In the present case, however, and in that lately brought forward by Mr. Fox concerning the conduct of convoys, no possible inconvenience whatever could arise. The minister, he said, betrayed his own cause, and showed clearly that it was not inquiry, but the result of it that he feared. With respect to convoys, Mr. Pitt said, "you will raise the expectation of merchants too high regarding future protection if you prosecute the inquiry. This clearly shows a consciousness that the convoys were insufficient. If they had been sufficient, surely nothing could be more desirable by ministers than to have that sufficiency proved. Inquiry then would have destroyed at once all injurious suspicions.

Though a proposition for inquiry should fail, he contended it was not without its use. He was much mistaken if the proposed inquiry relating to convoys would not produce much benefit to the country. We should not, he believed, hear in future of manufacturers being disappointed in the sale of their commodities for want of convoys; nor, if merchantmen should not arrive in time, would convoys sail now without them. Neither would there again be a property of half a million consigned to the protection of one frigate and two sloops, as in the case of the first Jamaica fleet.

The present inquiry was, however, on grounds different and much stronger than those on which Mr. Fox's motion was made; Mr. Dundas could not deny they were now at issue on facts; for though he had come down loaded with official papers to contradict what he (Mr. Sheridan) had formerly advanced, he still persisted in his original assertion; and, unless Mr. Dundas should produce those papers of which he read extracts, he would charge him with deceiving the house by false representation. Deception had actually taken place, but probably not with any intention to deceive. The right hon. secretary might well be supposed ignorant of the state of some part of his Majesty's extended dominions, when it was recollected that nearly a year ago he had complained of the heavy burden of his manifold offices,



saying, that, from the moment he laid down at night till he rose in the morning, he felt that he had duties upon him which he could not adequately fulfil. Notwithstanding that complaint, and the prospect then held out of speedy relief, no one had yet heard of any assistant being established, or any diminution of the duty taking place. Summer, autumn, winter had passed and spring was come; and yet the right hon. secretary still groaned under the same load.

If his former charges relating to Nova Scotia had been too strong, he would readily have retracted them; but, on the contrary, he meant to add to them; as, from appearances, his Majesty's ministers had not simply overlooked Nova Scotia, but (being apprised of its importance, and not ignorant of its defenceless state at the breaking out of the war) had wilfully neglected it, and left it exposed to all attacks. To his former charges he also now added a charge of the same negligence at New Brunswick, that Halifax had experienced.

Mr. Dundas had been pleased to consider all his former charges as only founded on an anonymous letter. One evil of the prevailing doctrines of the day, he thought, was changing the manly and generous character of Englishmen into that of eaves-droppers and informers: another was, that all spirited and constitutional exertions were regarded as factious and seditious. To apply to the house of commons rather than the crown, or even its ministers, was now subject to that imputation. Mr. Grey's conduct in writing down to his constituents relative to an important subject, on which he was to give his opinion in that house, had been represented in the same way.

Formerly members wished to consult with their constituents, and were proud of maintaining this intercourse; now such conduct was branded as seditious. Perhaps, he said, Mr. Grey's letter to Newcastle, and his own to Falmouth would, in Scotland, have subjected them to sentences similar to those lately passed, which have disgraced the star chamber and the worst reign of the worst Stuart. The letter he had written to Falmouth had been sent to ministers; and had from that channel crept into a morning paper, with a pretended discovery attached to it. He should, however, soon deprive the comments by which it was accompanied of their gall. The letter he had quoted concerning Halifax, the house would recollect he had stated, came from a

merchant there, and not from Falmouth; and whereas the letter to that town says that the subject was mentioned on the first day of the session, it is notorious he never mentioned the subject of Halifax on that day; so that this letter of his (which he did not deny) referred obviously to some other subject. The letter he should never be ashamed to own, as it contained in three sentences four praiseworthy things. 1. A gentleman-like acknowledgment of a civil letter. 2. That he had so early availed himself of intelligence received, as in his capacity of a representative of the people, to mention it on the first day of the session. 3. That he had used such diligence of investigation as to confirm in his own mind every particular. 4. That he should be happy of any intelligence in future which might be of service to the country.

He then read an extract, as follows, from the *True Briton* of the previous day.

"MR. ANONYMOUS DISCOVERED!!

"*Though Mr. SHERIDAN, in the course of debate in the house of commons quoted a letter, the writer of which he was unwilling to expose, we can assure the public that the letter had a name to it, as will appear by the following answer which was sent to it by the worthy senator:*

"SIR,

"*I am much obliged by your communication respecting Halifax. I mentioned the subject in the house the first day in the session, and I since find your intelligence confirmed in every particular. I shall be happy at all times to be favoured with any intelligence which you think may be made use of for the advantage of the country.*

"*I am, Sir, your obedient servant,*

(Signed) "R. B. SHERIDAN.

"*Lower Grosvenor-street, January 29th.*

Directed—"London, January 29th, 1794.

"MR. J. BLUETT,

"Free, R. B. SHERIDAN.

"Falmouth."

"*The above letter went of course as it was directed, and was taken out of the post-office at Falmouth by the only person of the name of Bluett in that place, who happens to be a young midshipman of about fifteen years of age. The boy's astonishment at the contents are not easily to be described. He handed the letter about the town, where it occasioned no small mirth, as that to the hon. member, to which the above was an answer, was thus proved to be one of those Cornish hums which some wag at Falmouth has practised upon several former occasions with similar success.*"

As to a Cornish hum, he said he never heard it before, though he had often heard of a Cornish hug, and a Cornish borough. But to quit this subject, he held in his hands upwards of fifty



letters from Halifax, all containing similar complaints to those of his anonymous letter, and expressing the greatest astonishment at the declarations made by Mr. Dundas, in the house, of the defensible state of that colony. Of these fifty letters, some he allowed were anonymous, but by far the greater part were signed. Of those signed, he was desired not to mention some names, as they would in consequence be looked on as marked and suspicious; and those who held places at all disposable by government would be sure to lose them. By far the greater number, however, had allowed him to use their names, and were ready to come forward as evidences at the bar of the house, to prove every word they had asserted.

He should not dwell on the importance of the colonies of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. This point seemed to be universally acknowledged. True it was, that compared to their individual utility, the expense of defending them might be deemed too great; but when regarded as instrumental to the defence of Canada and Newfoundland, Halifax itself was better than the thirteen states of America. If, too, by any event, a rupture should ever take place with America, which the highly censurable conduct of ministers to that nation had rendered too probable, the importance of Nova Scotia would be great indeed. It was found likewise to be a place highly serviceable for the recovery of soldiers when injured by residence in the West Indies—more so than any other climate in the world. We could not, in case of war with America, be master of the West Indian sea without having access in the winter months to the harbour of Halifax. Indeed, former ministers, by the peace establishment they kept up there, showed clearly enough their opinion of its importance.

He then took a view of the various peace establishments since the peace of 1783, at which time we had there six regiments, one fifty-gun ship, and five or six frigates. From this time, he said, the subsequent establishments were gradually diminished. In 1785, the naval department consisted only of one fifty-gun ship and four or five frigates; and in 1789, of two frigates and three sloops alone. It was clear, he said, if such a force were unnecessary at each of those periods, it was highly extravagant to have them kept up; and, if it were necessary, then the great diminution of force at the crisis of war was highly culpable.

If we watch and follow the plans of ministry, who seem to sup-

pose themselves immaculate, we shall find, by all the arguments they have used, that they saw the war was inevitable so early as August, 1792; and yet they were taken by surprise in February, 1793.

The only force at Halifax, at the commencement of the war, was one single frigate, the *Hussar*, of twenty-eight guns, Captain George, two companies of the 4th regiment, about ninety men, and one company of artillery. He called on the right hon. secretary to stand up and declare if such a force was adequate to the protection of such a colony, when we had to contend with an enemy so active and powerful as France.

Mr. Dundas had said, in answer to the charge he formerly brought forward, of the scandalous neglect of ministers, he had taken ample care of this colony, and had provided sufficient force for its protection, for that in Nova Scotia there were 9000 men, and in Halifax alone 4000. This statement he explicitly denied, and undertook to prove its fallacy at the bar of the house. If, as Mr. Dundas, said, the colony were loyal, which he perfectly well knew, it was more criminal to leave it destitute and exposed to the enemy, and ready to yield to any force that might be sent against it.

General Wentworth's corps, which Mr. Dundas had so strenuously insisted was numerous, well chosen, and well appointed, was composed of not more than 350 men, and those most wretchedly selected, and not recognised by General Ogilvie. As to the opinion of Governor Wentworth, so much boasted of, he said it could not be forgotten that he was not a military man, but merely a civilian invested with a military rank and office for the sake of the emoluments attached to them. It was not to be wondered at that a governor should be inclined to think well of his own provision for defence. The new raised corps, however, was defective both in numbers and equipment: 350 men, and those not strong and athletic young men, or disciplined like our militia, but taken (as the requisition men are in France) from 16 to 60 years of age.

If Mr. Dundas takes shelter under the declamation of Governor Wentworth, he should then, he declared, make him the object of a serious charge.

He expressed much surprise that Mr. Dundas had only read, on a former occasion, extracts of the governor's letters, and had not submitted the whole of them to the house. He wished also



for more information on the subject from General Ogilvie, who was commander-in-chief of the colony.

He was glad to see an hon. admiral (Gardner) in his place, as he had some questions to put to him of great importance; which, from his ready explanation on a former occasion, he was persuaded he would answer without reserve. He could not assent to that secrecy and professional mystery which was sometimes affected. The house was, and ought to be, adequate to the comprehension of all subjects connected with the welfare of the kingdom. They were constitutionally, and in fact, competent to decide on the conduct of lawyers, admirals, and judges. He should decline animadverting on the attack of Martinique at present; though he had no doubt much blame was due to ministers for their conduct respecting that island.

Admiral Gardner sailed, he said, to the West Indies in February; and, after the ill-planned expedition against Martinique, returned again to England with a convoy on the 24th of July. By the confession of ministers the expedition against Martinique had completely failed from defective information; and there was no other object in the West Indies on which our fleet could be beneficially employed. Admiral Gardner, he was bound to suppose, knew of no force on the American coast, nor that the French Admiral Sercy had sailed there; in fact, this information had reached him at Barbadoes. He wished, therefore, to ask him if he had been ordered positively to return home, or whether he had directions to follow Sercy to America?

Admiral Gardner had said, that little force was requisite to convoy our trade to the West Indies. Was it not obvious that Admiral Sercy might think exactly like Admiral Gardner? And if so, that he might send a small force home with the French trade, and himself remain behind with the greatest force, to plan and execute other expeditions? This supposition was probable; supposing, as Admiral Gardner had said, he had reason to imagine the French trade would have returned to Europe.—That Lord Howe being in the channel was an objection to this supposition he denied, as two additional sail of the line would have been no security to the French trade against Lord Howe's fleet; they would have only enriched the prize; he wished, therefore, to ask if Admiral Gardner had the discretion to watch and follow Admiral Sercy? And if so, why he had come home

with all his force, excepting two sail of the line which he sent to Jamaica as a convoy, when he asserted that a great convoy was useless? There was no particular call for the hon. admiral's service at home, nor that of his fleet. He had not since been employed in any very active service; nor would he have been of less use to his country in watching and following the enemy on the coast of America. Nothing that he saw prevented the admiral going to Halifax to winter, or at least he might have sent part of his squadron there. This, he thought, he should have done, unless he had received positive information that the French admiral had sailed for Europe. That Admiral Gardner was expected at Halifax he knew from various sources of information. Captain Norris, who succeeded Captain Courtney in the command of the *Boston*, when he fell in the very gallant action with the *Ambuscade*, had written to Halifax under the presumption that Admiral Gardner was there: and he was so sanguinely expected, that cattle was bought up for victualling the squadron under his command. That Halifax, being defenceless, was in danger, he maintained, and would prove at the bar of the house. He had evidence that vessels were actually fitted out at New York for an expedition against Halifax, under Admiral Sercy; and that nothing but a most fortunate accident (the mutiny on board the French fleet) had prevented it. The *Hussar* had been followed nearly from the coast of America to Halifax, and the force there was well known to the French. At that time Halifax was so destitute and defenceless, that the cannon in many ports was not mounted, and the fortifications were in a state of ruin. There were on shore only 90 men of the 4th regiment, one company of artillery, and 350 ill-disciplined and wretched militia. He called, therefore, strongly on Mr. Dundas, either from better recollection to admit the truth of this description, or to maintain his former assertion of the respectable state of defence in which the colony was at that time. He was sure two frigates might have taken Halifax and destroyed all the stores and naval magazines. He thought that leaving the American coast defenceless was highly impolitic, not only with respect to our trade, but also with regard to the appearance we ought to have kept up with America, towards whom we should at that time have conducted ourselves in such a manner as to raise their opinion of our activity and force, particularly by sea. All his letters, he declared, ex-



pressed great astonishment at the declarations made by Mr. Dundas of the state of security of Halifax. It was well known that the troops had been withdrawn, both from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, to enforce the expedition against Martinique. This was unknown at the time to the agents of the regiments, and even to the secretary at war. From New Brunswick to Halifax, the place of rendezvous, they were sent without convoy, and exposed to the ships of war and privateers of the enemy. It never was so essential to look high and powerful in the eyes of America, as when we were insulting her by arbitrary orders of council, and when it was but too evident we had estranged her good will ; at such a time the honour of the British flag should have been doubly guarded.

If too, as Mr. Dundas had said, it was doubtful how far the British flag in an armed ship would have been welcome in an American port, the suspicion became so much the stronger that the Americans would assist the French ; and in that view, it was the more incumbent on us to protect our flag from insult, instead of exposing it as we had done to the mercy of our enemies. If neither a desire to protect our trade or colonies, or to maintain the credit of our flag, could instigate ministers to send a force there, they should, in point of policy, have taken advantage of the favourable opportunity which the improper conduct of Genet, the French minister, gave us, of conciliating the Americans. From the commencement of the war till October, when the mutiny broke out on board the French fleet, the whole coast of America was left destitute ; the panic was not confined to Halifax, it extended even to Canada ; and Lord Dorchester had taken sudden precautions against an attack. New Brunswick had been put in the best state of defence of which it was capable. It had been left too at the moment of peril, destitute of force sufficient to resist a single frigate. Such was our want of naval force, that the *Earl of Mansfield*, a large and valuable ship, laden with naval stores, came to Halifax from Nova Scotia without a convoy ; and for want of one it was now detained at an expense of £460 a month. So great was the alarm, that at Halifax the inhabitants, the governor, &c., began to remove their furniture from fear of the enemy. These being his sentiments, which he undertook to prove at the bar, it was incumbent on the house to investigate the business : for either he, or those he charged, should be

brought to shame. He should propose the production of all papers relative to the subject, as proper evidence, which he would complete by oral testimony at the bar. He wished the right hon. secretary to come fairly forward, and not to come down with the weight of official authority, and read a few extracts. In the present case there were no circumstances that rendered a disclosure of facts improper. All he had advanced, he demanded only permission to prove at the bar of the house. It was not for him to say why a governor put a good face on his own exertions, and spoke of the security of that which had never been attacked; neither was he to speak of the motives which might induce a colonel to speak handsomely of his own corps, from which he received emolument, at the same time that he promoted the patronage of government. He wished to have the authority of General Ogilvie, whom he thought most competent to decide on military subjects. He himself should produce in proof of what he asserted, the evidence of officers who had served at Halifax, of eminent engineers who were perfectly acquainted with the colony, and likewise of members of the council at Halifax. So confident was he of the facts which he had stated, and the competence of his proof, that if any merchant of repute who had correspondence at Halifax, would say that the general tenor of his letters from thence were not of the same complexion that he had described, he declared he was ready to take on himself that shame and criminality he was convinced he should fix on others. He not only meant to charge ministers with a highly criminal neglect, but also to couple with that charge another against Mr. Dundas, or Governor Wentworth, of having grossly deceived the house of commons on a very important subject, at a very critical time. Nothing could more show the fallacy of Mr. Pitt's principles against inquiry, than their standing in opposition to such strong and concurrent testimonies of dangerous neglect. So important did this principle of inquiry now appear, that rather than submit to any diminution of it, he should give it as his opinion that those who brought forward those inquiries, should themselves be exposed to animadversion if they failed in making them good. He particularly condemned all attempts in ministers to dictate their opinions to that house. Neither the time nor manner of its proceeding was subject, he contended, to their authority. He concluded by moving for the following papers:—



1. Extracts of accounts from Governor Wentworth.
2. All official accounts relative to Halifax.
3. All official accounts from General Ogilvie.
4. Returns of effective force.
5. Correspondence between ministers and General Ogilvie.
6. Extracts of journals of papers transmitted in 1793, through the postmaster-general to ministers.

*After a long debate,*

Mr. Sheridan rose in reply.—He said, what he wished most particularly to know had been carefully concealed, namely, whether, after the *Winchelsea* reached Admiral Gardner, that officer had acted according to his own discretion, or whether he was tied up from assisting Halifax by the orders of government. The pressing necessity of his presence at home had indeed been stated as the cause of his neglect of Halifax ; but it did not appear that the necessity was at all pressing, since he came home at great leisure ; nor could the service in the Mediterranean be alleged in vindication of his return and abandonment of Halifax, since the English fleet sailed for the Mediterranean in May, and Admiral Gardner did not arrive in Europe till October. If the admiral obeyed his orders, he must approve his conduct as far as it personally related to him ; but if he had a discretionary power, he must strongly condemn it. It had been said, who can attack Halifax in the winter ? and from this it would be inferred that the admiral, in leaving it to its fate, had left it in no danger. But he must inform the house, that during the last forty-five years, there had not been more than three severe frosts, and it might be fairly calculated that the harbour was not frozen more than once in ten years. It was, therefore, a mistake to suppose that the severity of the winter would baffle the efforts of the French. It had been asserted that the whole house was pretty much agreed as to the information respecting Halifax ; but he thought there was some difference in it, for he had heard nothing that night respecting the nine thousand strong, athletic young fellows, about whom the right hon. secretary had on a former occasion made so much boast. However, he supposed we would have it all in the papers ; but, notwithstanding the opinion of others, he conceived there was a very wide difference in their information ; and, therefore, he thought the most proper way of coming at the truth would be by going into a solemn inquiry. The circumstance of

Governor Wentworth's receiving no emoluments on account of his new corps had been asserted with triumph, and he certainly was not able flatly to contradict it; but, although he might not receive a direct income, yet the patronage of the regiment, by which he might provide for relations and dependents, was not to be treated lightly. With equal exultation had it been stated, that 800 of the inhabitants of Halifax had thrown themselves in the way, and shown a preference of being employed as military, rather than of being exempted. But here the right hon. secretary disclosed a fact highly alarming to this country, and dangerous to the fidelity of our colonies; he had disclosed, that in the hour of danger our colonies must depend upon themselves for protection; and if once they were confirmed in that belief, and were also trained to the use of arms, their affections for this country must diminish, and even their allegiance become equivocal. He wished the right hon. secretary had assigned any other reason for abandoning Halifax; that he had even said it was by the neglect or mistake of government, or by casual necessity, which should be averted in future; for any reason he would more readily have admitted, than one which seemed so mischievous in principle to the safety of all our colonial possessions. He denied that the regular troops in Halifax had, in July, exceeded 350; and repeated his assertions respecting their feebleness. As to the calling out of the militia, the government could claim no merit on that account, since it was done by the assembly; and so far from resembling our militia, it was simply the *posse comitatus*, a number of raw, undisciplined men, who could not well be kept together, or who, if forced to remain always on the defensive, might discover they were under no obligation to this country, and might therefore think of separating from us. The good fortune of Commodore George in escaping the French, had been related as meritorious to the commanders in Halifax; but although they were fortunate, he could not say they were wise. When that officer sailed for the West Indies, there were two French line-of-battle ships and several frigates in the Chesapeake, or at New York; and it was indeed singularly fortunate that he was not captured by them, for if he had proper information, he had a right to conclude that there was much more probability of his falling into the enemies' hands than of escaping. To refute the assertions of the vigilance of govern-



ment in taking measures of defence at Halifax, he stated, that though that colony had been deprived of her strength early in the summer, yet no effective measures had been taken till September: even on the 5th of August no attempt had been made, not a militia-man called out, nor a gun mounted on the batteries; nor is it probable any measures of precaution would have been even taken when they were, had it not been for the alarm created by the arrival of the French in the Chesapeake; and he declared that he would produce officers of equal credit and importance with Major Hodgson to substantiate these facts. He would not accuse the right hon. secretary, or even Governor Wentworth, of a concerted design to impose upon the public by the information which had been produced in that house; but he was firmly persuaded, that if no imposition was intended, a great mistake must have arisen somewhere. The dispatches of Governor Wentworth, which had been produced as authentic statements of the situation of Halifax, he had been told, and circumstances led him to believe he had been told truly, were written with a design that they might fall into the hands of the French; for at that time almost every vessel sent to sea had been captured, and certainly it would have been indiscreet to have run any hazard of making the enemy acquainted with the really wretched state of the place; for so truly was this the fact, and so great was the alarm, that what had been described as excessive loyalty, was nothing else than an anxiety for their own safety—an anxiety which induced the better sort of people to take spades in their hands, and to work on the fortifications like common labourers, in order to inspire and animate the populace. They said, “We are willing to erect works and defend the place if you will but give us a director.” But all this vigour in the inhabitants was merely produced by the criminal neglect of government, which had lowered the military establishment at a time of such imminent danger. He asked if it was possible to produce a single merchant in the trade of Halifax, to say he approved of the manner in which Halifax had been defended? He concluded with calling on ministers again, to come forward to satisfy the public upon this subject; and said he was sure that nothing but a fair and candid inquiry could be satisfactory to the public.

*The first motion was then put and carried, and the second negatived.*

*Admiral Gardner informed the house, he had information of the two French*

*seventy-fours and frigates; but he understood they were to return to France, and he had hopes of falling in with them in his passage home, and he did not hear of their sailing for America until after he had sailed towards home.*

Mr. Sheridan was satisfied with the observation of the hon. admiral, as far as it went to the point of intelligence of the destination of the French fleet; but condemned the whole conduct of the English fleet upon that expedition. If the hon. admiral had no discretion, but had positive orders for what he did, no blame could be attached to him. If he was allowed to judge for himself; he had acted indiscreetly; he had no right to catechise the hon. admiral, but he was bound, as a member of that house, to make these observations.

*The other motions were then put and carried.*

Mr. Sheridan then moved, "that there be laid before the house a copy of the memorial delivered this day to the secretary of state, by merchants interested in the trade of Halifax, residing in London."

*Mr. Dundas said, that such a memorial was delivered this day to him about three o'clock in the afternoon, and it was only a paper delivered for the purpose of asking, on the part of the merchants concerned in it, what kind of protection they were to have in future: he thought it dangerous to disclose to the public the plan on which they, or any other part of his Majesty's dominions, were to be defended in time of war. He did not pretend to say he had perused the whole of it attentively, but he thought it would be highly improper to give its contents, under all the circumstances, to the public.*

Mr. Sheridan contended that the very circumstance of the merchants asking how they were to be defended in future, was pretty strong evidence that they were dissatisfied with the manner in which they had hitherto been defended, and that ministers were either unwilling or unable to lay down any plan for defending them; else why should a memorial be presented, asking how they are to be defended in future? He stated this to show that ministers, in the opinion of these merchants, had been either regardless of their defence, or too ignorant to know in what manner they ought to have been defended. A memorial was a public paper, which, unless a reason was assigned for withholding it, ought to be laid before parliament.

*The motion, by permission, was afterwards withdrawn.*

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FEBRUARY 24.

## PETITION FROM THE REV. FISCHE PALMER.

*By sentences of the court of justiciary at Edinburgh, and of the circuit court at Perth, in August and September, 1793, Mr. Muir and Mr. Palmer, for the crime of leasing making,\* were adjudged to transportation; and Botany Bay was understood at the time the sentences were passed, to be the place to which they would be transported. These were the first instances in which transportation was imposed by the court of justiciary in Scotland for an offence of that nature. In the last session of parliament, within a few days after the house of lords had finally decided that no appeal was competent from the court of justiciary in matters of law.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, he held in his hand a petition from the Rev. Fische Palmer, humbly representing that the petitioner was now suffering under what he conceived to be an illegal judgment of the court of justiciary in Scotland, from which there was no appeal to any other court of justice, and praying such relief as to the wisdom of the house should seem meet. The date of the petition was some weeks prior to the time of presenting it, which he conceived, on due consideration of the circumstances that had arisen to occasion the delay, could be no objection to its being received. It had been put into his hands yesterday, and he now moved for leave to bring it up.

*Mr. Pitt said the house could not suffer a petition to be brought up, the purport of which was to pray the interposition of the house between a sentence pronounced by a competent court, and the execution of that sentence. The regular mode of proceeding was, by a petition to the crown for mercy. The house could interfere only where legislative matter was stated as the ground of the application.*

Mr. Sheridan said, the petition was perfectly within the rules of the house: it contained no application for mercy; it complained of a sentence against law, and surely it would not be contended that the house of commons was not the proper place to resort to for redress against such a sentence.

*Mr. Pitt afterwards, in reply to Mr. Fox, observed, that on a point so important, on which no previous notice had been given, in order to obviate even the hazard of a rash decision, he should move to adjourn the debate till the 27th.*

Mr. Sheridan said, after the good effects produced in the present instance by reconsideration, in consequence of what had been

\* A term in the Scottish law, importing the speaking of words tending to excite discord between the king and his people.

said by his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox) he could have no objection to the adjournment. But let the house consider if the motion of which notice had been given for that day should be postponed, as he thought it ought to be, what would be the state of it on a future day? If his hon. friend (Mr. Adam) were to go merely into the record, in order to do that, it was only necessary that he should have the record before him. But the record had been refused. His hon. friend would therefore be under the necessity of going into the whole case at large. He therefore wished that the house would also reconsider their refusal of the record, without which, when the motion came before them, they would be arguing in the dark.

*The motion for resuming the debate on the 27th was put and carried.*

*Mr. Whitbread afterwards moved, "That an humble address be presented to his Majesty, requesting that his Majesty will be graciously pleased to give directions for preventing the said Reverend Thomas Fysche Palmer being sent in the transport on which he is now on board, till after Thursday next." It was negatived.*

*A debate followed.*

Mr. Sheridan remarked, that those who had opposed the motion had confounded two things perfectly distinct—the motion which was to have been brought on by his learned friend (Mr. Adam), and the state of the question as it at present stood. Those who espoused the same side of the question with himself had been accused by an hon. gentleman (and the idea, though not expressly asserted, seemed, in some degree, to be countenanced by the right hon. gentleman who had spoken last) with having attempted to inveigle ministers into a declaration of their sentiments. It was really somewhat amusing that they should be accused with having endeavoured to surprise the candour and impose upon the ingenuousness of ministers. They, good simple souls, it seemed, were only to be attacked in this manner; and the only advantage which opposition had to expect, was to be derived from this mode of attack. But if he was allowed to advert to the statement of facts, he conceived that nothing could be more fair and direct than the conduct of those who had espoused the cause of those unfortunate men who had unfortunately incurred the vengeance of the law, and nothing more suspicious than the conduct of their opponents. He, with a noble lord, and another hon. gentleman, had waited upon a right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) at a very early stage of this business. They, at



his request, presented him with a statement of the ground upon which they meant to oppose the decisions in these trials which had lately taken place in Scotland. He must confess that the hon. gentleman had, in this interview, conducted himself with the utmost candour and politeness. Upon being presented with a report of the objections to the trials, as a sufficient proof that he allowed them some weight, he had immediately transmitted them to Scotland. But afterwards, upon receiving an answer from the judges, he had assumed a very different conduct and had neither thought proper to present them, nor the parties concerned, with a copy of that answer. One hon. gentleman has stated that, after various attempts in this business, we have in every instance failed in our object. The same hon. gentleman has, however, rather unluckily, accused us with delay. That we have indeed failed in all our former attempts to bring this business to a fair discussion, is the reason why we found it still necessary to persevere. A good deal of delay has, however, arisen from the other side. When my learned friend (Mr. Adam) moved for some papers relative to the late trials in Scotland, the right hon. gentleman took four days to consider of the question, before he thought proper to give a negative to the motion. There were other causes of delay, besides those which arose from this dilatory conduct on the part of the ministry. There were some circumstances of such peculiar delicacy, that he should merely glance at them, but which had operated in preventing this petition from being brought forward sooner to the house. It was conceived that, from the influence of certain connections, it would neither be proper or humane to advise the petitioners to have recourse to the present mode of seeking relief by petition, while there remained the smallest chance of obtaining favour from royal mercy. It was conceived too, that as the prerogative to pardon was particularly vested in the crown, a petition of this sort, addressed to the house of commons, might wear an appearance of what of all things we were chiefly desirous to avoid—a wish to trench upon this prerogative. Besides, an idea was studiously held out that the royal mercy might be extended, if opposition to the sentence was not too strongly pressed in a certain obnoxious quarter. From the influence of these motives, this petition was deterred from being sooner brought forward. The sentence, said Mr. Sheridan, I affirm in every respect to have been most hostile to

the principles of this constitution, and in its nature most unjust, illegal, and oppressive—it is such a sentence that, if it had taken place in England, I should not have been surprised that the country had risen up in arms to oppose it; and as little should I have been surprised if the attempt to introduce the law on which this sentence is founded, into this country, should have cost the head of that minister who should have dared so grossly to insult the principles of the British constitution. There is not, I will assert, one Englishman who has heard the proceedings on these trials, whose feelings do not revolt at the recital: and if such are the feelings of Englishmen, what conduct ought these feelings to dictate to us in the present instance? If such is the spirit of the English law, and Scotland forms a part of the British empire, why ought she to be excluded from that protection which all the subjects of that empire have a right to expect from this house? When my hon. friend mentioned that he had not seen those gentlemen (Messrs. Muir and Palmer) who are unfortunately connected with the present discussion, I am sure that he meant them no personal disrespect. I have seen them—seen them associated with convicts of the most worthless and despicable description; seen them, not indeed loaded with irons, but those irons freshly taken off. I have seen them separated from one another—surely an unnecessary addition to their sufferings—thus wantonly depriving them of that last of all consolation, the society of affliction. In reverting to the particular circumstance which was the ground of the motion, I beg leave to put the case, that instead of a sentence of transportation, it had been a sentence of death; suppose that the petition states that the petitioner was not the person who ought to have been tried; and then imagine that the execution was to take place on Wednesday, the day previous to that appointed for the consideration of the petition; if in such a case the unhappy petitioner should fall an innocent victim to the weak or wicked policy of a minister, that minister ought himself to suffer the death which he had thus wrongfully inflicted. There is one circumstance in the present case which cannot be too often recalled, or too forcibly urged, namely, that the court of whose sentence we complain, is a court from which there is no appeal. In the present instance the sentence is tantamount to death itself, a banishment for seven or fourteen years from all the enjoyments of polished society, from all the conso-



lations of friendship, and the reciprocation of domestic endearment. If the facts shall be proved to be such as I have endeavoured to show, there will be such a case made out as should induce you to give immediate relief to the individual, and to provide a speedy remedy for the law. If such be the fact, the feelings of those gentlemen who would resist the affording such relief are not very desirable, nor are their consciences much to be envied. I shall only add, that if the sentence, which it is the object of this motion to suspend, shall take place before Thursday, ministers will stand in a situation of responsibility which it certainly will not be pleasant for them to incur, and which, perhaps, at a future period, they may wish they had avoided.

*The house divided—for the motion 34 ; against it 104.*

FEBRUARY 25.

PENNY-POST BILL.

*Mr. C. Long proposed a resolution to the committee, to consider of the conveyance of letters by the penny post. He stated that as the law now stood, letters sent by this conveyance from any part of the city of London or Westminster, the borough of Southwark or the suburbs, to any other part thereof, were liable to pay one penny ; but if sent from the city of London, &c. to any place out of that city and suburbs, another penny was payable. In like manner he proposed an additional penny should be payable upon letters put into the penny-post office out of the city of London, &c., and conveyed to any place within the cities of London, Westminster, or the suburbs. He said that the object of laying the additional penny in the manner he proposed, was to defray the additional expense which would be incurred by increasing the number of deliverers of letters by the penny post, which he said were in future to be delivered six times a day instead of two, and that the regulation was to take effect as soon as possible.*

MR. SHERIDAN observed that this was a comical sort of Irish tax, or penny-post, where a man was to pay two-pence for it. He objected to this as a new tax, under the title of regulation of an old one ; and that although the case was trivial in itself, yet the principle on which it proceeded was wrong ; for that the regular conduct of finance should be, first, a supply was to be agreed upon to a certain amount, and then, after time being allowed to consider the case attentively, the ways and means for raising that supply were to be proposed ; and, again, some time was to be given to the house to consider on the mode of raising that supply ; and the whole being determined, there could not after that regularly, be an additional tax for that year. The present pro-

position was not a new tax in point of form or name, but was so in point of fact; for it proposed an additional tax on the carriage of certain letters under the title of the penny-post. This, he contended, ought to have been brought forward in the ways and means of the year; for at that time the public ought to have known all the burthens they were to bear for the ensuing year.

*The Speaker observed, that the bill, in point of form, was quite regular.*

Mr. Sheridan did not question the propriety of the regulation, but only wished that the principle should be established, that when the minister had once stated his ways and means for the year, he should not be repeatedly coming to parliament to propose fresh taxes under the name of regulations.

*The bill passed, and the report ordered to be received on the next day.*

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FEBRUARY 26.

ATTORNEIES' TAX BILL.

MR. SHERIDAN concurred in opinion with his hon. friend (Mr. Adam) that the tax was ill-founded in its principle, and would be ineffectual in its operation. He also thought that it was a tax of passion: it was too much the custom of the present day to catch at the prevailing prejudices of the people and humour them; thus we had entered into a war of passion; the very approbation of the house, when the tax was proposed, clearly demonstrated it to be the result of prejudice against the profession, which, though a few individuals might have acted dishonourably, abounded with men of the most fair and most respectable characters. And the expression used by the right hon. gentleman, in answer to this applause, showed the source whence this tax originated, viz. "he wished that he could have made it the only article in his budget." He observed that the right hon. gentleman had said, taxes were laid on other respectable trades which were not considered a stigma; true, there were taxes for licenses on alehouse-keepers, dealers in spirits, and others of the like kind, but those were regulated by the excise. There were also taxes paid by persons who held places under government, which he was certain the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) thought no stigma.

*Mr. Pitt denied that he had used the words as Mr. Sheridan had quoted them; they were used in warmth and when the house was by no means orderly, and merely*



*on the spur of the occasion ; but, as well as he could recollect, his words were, " he wished every article in his budget was as highly approved."*

*Mr. Jekyll said, that this tax was a very great hardship, as the court could strike from the roll any person, or cancel his indentures, for even an opinion that he was not qualified to act as an attorney.*

Mr. Sheridan said, that what had fallen from his hon. and learned friend (Mr. Jekyll) weighed much in his mind. The present chief justice, the honour and integrity of whose conduct merits every applause, had taken much pains to render this profession respectable, by removing from it, for their irregularity and misconduct, such persons as he could lay his hands on. He must now find his hands very much tied up as to the removal of attornies, after paying this tax, or they will be liable to injustice, if, after paying such a sum, they may be removed at the pleasure of the court, without their money being refunded. He also observed that, instead of answering the effect of leaving young men some property to keep them from acting improperly, it would take from them a large part of what little they possess.

#### PENNY-POST BILL.

*The resolutions of the committee for regulating the mode of conveying letters by the penny-post being read,*

Mr. Sheridan renewed the objections which he stated yesterday on that subject. He allowed, in point of strictness, this was not absolutely irregular, but in point of spirit it certainly was so ; for in reality a new tax of one penny each letter, &c., was imposed on the public that was not brought forward in the ways and means of the year. Having enforced this by many observations, he said he was anxious that some reason should appear on the journals why the house should consent to so extraordinary a step, and therefore he moved that, after the words expressing the sum to be raised, should follow these words, " towards defraying the expense for more frequent and speedy delivery of letters by the penny-post."

*Mr. Pitt agreed with Mr. Sheridan on the propriety of this amendment, and maintained all his former arguments on the regularity and propriety of the measure itself.*

*After a short conversation between the chancellor of the exchequer and Mr. Sheridan, the resolutions were read, agreed to, and a bill in pursuance of them was ordered to be brought in.*

THURSDAY 17.

SESSION WITH THE REV. FREDERICK PARKER.

It was generally said, it is understood that the chancellor of the exchequer had done you no wrong at his time, since the justice in his conduct was all natural, and that he was now disposed to come to the resolution of his mind. Indeed, the question was so plain that it ought never to have been argued: the petition ought to have been rejected on its face and read, and there should have been a short address upon the subject, and would it be necessary for me to argue the case—I was too clear to require any discussion. He then opened proceedings exactly in point upon this matter, and it would be necessary for him to detail them. He mentioned however, the case of Thomas Pilkington as being exactly in point with that of the present petition. He then called for the reading of a resolution respecting the right of the house to inquire into the conduct of courts of justice (which was accordingly read). This order, he said, would be only a mockery if the house not that it did not receive the petition, but agree to leave the matter to be moved for by his learned friend (Mr. ALMON) afterwards in that hall in the table also.

The petition was brought up and read.

MARCH 21.

MR. ALMON'S HISTORY RESPECTING THE TRIALS OF THE REV. FREDERICK PARKER AND MR. MUIR.

On this day Mr. ALMON moved for a review of the trials of Mr. Muir and the Rev. F. Parker. From the records furnished, no object, he said was to question the equity of the sentence passed upon them. But as an appeal could be from the sentence of the court, however paramount, he proposed, in consequence of the dissipation of the case to move for the production of certain records relating to the trial, and for a petition to the crown in their favour. The lord advocate of Scotland, Mr. WYNDHAM, and Mr. PEAR, maintained strongly for the propriety of the sentence, and of the proceedings of the Scotch courts. Mr. FOX and Mr. RICHARDS supported the motion.

MR. HARRIDAN confessed, that he never felt it to be so utterly impossible to be silent as after arguments which he had just heard from the lord advocate of Scotland.

The learned lord, not confining his observations to the individual case before the house, had adverted to matters of the greatest moment, to matters which implicated this question—



Whether the law of England ought not to be assimilated to that of Scotland? In the commencement of his speech, he seemed to doubt the competency of any person to argue the subject, unless his attention had been not only directed to professional studies, but unless he had spent his whole life in them; that his learned friend's life had not been so spent was a circumstance of joy to him, because he had not by such means narrowed his mind.

In the progress of his observations the learned lord has divided his countrymen into two classes, the associators, and the levellers and republicans; he will not admit that there is any middle class, and of consequence none qualified to act as an honest and impartial jury. This is indeed a melancholy representation, and it is to be hoped that the country furnishes some exceptions to this general division of character. There were some who belonged neither to the one class nor to the other; and who, though they would not condescend to crouch at the foot of power, would still defend the constitution with unabated activity and courage. Having given such a character of his countrymen in Scotland, the lord advocate had confessed his ignorance of the law of England, but had expressed a wish that the house would believe him to be learned in the law of Scotland. If his statements of that law were correct, he had presented a picture calculated to alarm and to frighten every man in that house and in the country. Would the learned lord, he would ask, or any other person, dare to attempt the introduction of a bill for transporting persons convicted of libels in England to Botany Bay? No, he would not.

In all the arguments which the lord advocate had used, Mr. Sheridan observed, that learned lord had gone farther than the necessity of the case required. In his statement of the evidence of Russell, he had mentioned that that witness was committed because he refused to answer. But had he brought this refusal within the point of law? Somebody, it appeared, had talked to the witness about his evidence; but did the lord advocate mean to say that talking to witnesses after their citation, rendered their evidence inadmissible? He certainly could not mean to palm such nonsense on the house as Scotch law: it was not, he would assert, the law of Scotland.

An attempt had been made to put the question on the footing of wishing to throw a stigma on the Scotch judges. What, he would ask, was the cause of the confidence of the people in the

judges of this country? Was it their character? No. It was the controlling power which the house had over those judges, and which was the best security for the proper administration of justice by them.

In entering into a history of his own feelings and conduct previous to the trial, the learned lord had stated, that, at the commencement of these transactions, he had begun to study the common law; and that, eighteen months ago, he had been obliged to read laws which had slept for near a century.

A more accurate character of the late trial could not be wished than this: this is so curious a circumstance, that if persons were present who had never heard of the recent proceedings in Scotland, they would say "What new crimes have these men committed, that it is necessary to go back one hundred years in order to find a punishment for them?" They would think that Scotland had exhibited a revival of the golden age for the last century; that no treasons and no insurrections had taken place within that period, when, in fact, there had been not only sedition and insurrections but two rebellions. Had the learned lord, during all that period, not heard even of one solitary instance? Had he not heard of the case of a Mr. Dundas of Arniston, who had received from the Duchess of Gordon some medals with the Pretender's head on them, which he had dispersed, and who had likewise gone so far as to harangue the faculty of advocates in favour of the Pretender?

As the lord advocate had gone into the evidence on the trials, it became fair for him to go into the accusation against Messrs. Muir and Palmer, and what, he asked, was this accusation? Mr. Palmer had been accused of inciting poor people to insist on a parliamentary reform. If the lord advocate had not been as ignorant of English history as of English law, he would have found some resemblance to Mr. Palmer's conduct; he would have found a resolution signed "Pitt" and "Richmond," from which resolution every word and sentiment used by Mr. Palmer had been stolen. I have here, said Mr. Sheridan, drawn up in three columns the declarations of Mr. Palmer, Mr. Pitt, and the Duke of Richmond, and Mr. Burke. I will not detain the house to read them, but I can declare that there is not one sentiment, one expression used by Mr. Palmer, which he has not borrowed from the others; with only this difference, that they have gone much greater lengths, and employed more forcible language in calling



the people to assert their right of universal suffrage, and to throw aside all dependence upon parliament. The learned gentleman boasts that, in conducting Mr. Muir's trial, the established course of proceeding was followed. He forgot, however, to state, that in summing up the evidence, while every circumstance of aggravation was brought forward, no notice was taken of any part of the evidence in favour of the accused.

The distinction between banishment and transportation Mr. Sheridan, according to his ideas of the subject, explained in a very different manner from what had been advanced by the lord advocate; and, notwithstanding his particular reference to the statute of 1686, Mr. Sheridan insisted that the two words were not of a synonymous meaning. The learned lord had argued very curiously with regard to leasing-making. He defined it to be merely telling lies or speaking a few idle words; and yet he has told us that the act of 1703, which rendered this offence formerly capital, liable only to an arbitrary punishment, could intend nothing less than transportation, as simple banishment would have been much too light a punishment. In order to support the legality of the proceedings of the court, he has stated a number of cases in which, though the statutes only gave them authority to impose a sentence of banishment, they had taken the liberty to inflict transportation; but the learned lord, in the unbounded triumph of his speech, comes at last to what he thinks a "clinch-  
ing argument" against those who appear friendly to the motion. He at once endeavours to silence us by the memorable case of Baillie, in the year 1704, several months after the law which has this evening been so often mentioned was passed. This instance his lordship, in the hey-day of his declamation, considers as the climax of his legal authority, which was to panic-strike and confound all his opponents. It was, however, very unfortunate for the lord advocate of Scotland, that of all cases which could be resorted to for the maintenance of an argument, this was, without exception, the worst and most odious. And why compare the abominable proceedings of the privy council to those of the court of justiciary? Ought a sentence of that court, in point of infamy not inferior to the star chamber, to be deemed a judicial precedent, and to furnish an authority for the court of justiciary on the present occasion? Indeed, in this opinion, he had the high authority of a great lawyer in the other house, who had said from

the woolsack last year, when the precedent of the appeal to the privy council in 1704 was stated, "You must not mention that; you cannot argue from it; it is no precedent." They had shown their contempt for the law passed only eight months before; they not only sentenced Baillie to transportation, but ordered him the pillory as a preliminary, and inflicted on him the epithet infamous, as a testimony of their christian charity and benevolence. For such an undue exercise of power these men ought to be execrated rather than held up to admiration; for, in this instance, there was a total departure from the letter of the law. The learned lord indeed, even in bringing forward a precedent, does not attempt to justify the sentence; he admits it to be severe, and brings it forward only to contrast it with the mercy of the present judges.

The question, however, ought to be more strictly attended to. It was not a discussion concerning the merits or demerits of the Scotch privy council in the year 1704, but whether, in the cases of Muir and Palmer, there now appeared sufficient grounds to order an examination into the conduct of the court of justiciary, and whether or not the whole proceedings ought to be revised, and, if necessary, amended? He hoped that gentlemen would deeply impress on their minds the serious consequences of these legal decisions, before they gave the vote which they were that night called upon to give. He lamented the modern Scotch explanation of the word sedition; believed that Muir and Palmer had been dealt with in an unconstitutional manner, and thought that a check or control ought to be given to the arbitrary conduct of the Scotch judges.

Much idle declamation had been made respecting the common law of the two countries. He was convinced that the common law of England was founded on the broad principles of common sense. He wished that the spirit of the criminal law were the same in both countries; and that the Scotch judges should divest themselves of extravagant partiality, and evince some respect to the common law of England, and to the common sense of every country. The learned gentleman has told us, that the trials of Messrs. Muir and Palmer were conducted by the common law of sedition. I cannot believe that there can be any such law; but, if such be the law, it ought not to be allowed to exist. Can it be consistent with any principles of equity and common sense, that the fate of individuals should hinge



upon a law which, the learned gentleman, himself, has admitted, has not been in exercise for a hundred years, and of which he has not been able to produce even one precedent. Every word which he has quoted from Sir George Mackenzie, furnishes an argument directly against his own assertions. Will he affirm that the case of Mr. Muir or Mr. Palmer comes under any of the three descriptions of sedition stated by that learned writer; or can he, with all his ingenuity, devise a fourth species of sedition, in which it can possibly be included? No; the species of crime which he has described is a monster as unknown to the law, as the proceedings are repugnant to every principle of justice. What is the crime charged, and the situation in which the accused has been placed? It is to put a person upon his trial on the suspicion of being a disaffected subject. It is to assume a right to prove against him general disaffection, without affording him an opportunity to repel any specific charge that may be brought against him. The learned gentleman stated, that he conceived himself entitled to bring forward the circumstance of circulating Flower's book, as a collateral proof of Mr. Muir's seditious intentions. What! bring forward a book of which not a single word is mentioned in the indictment, the legality of which was never called in question, which was not before the court, and of which not even one sentence was read to the jury! This is to put a man upon his trial without affording him either the means of defence, or the hopes of acquittal; to drag him to the bar to answer upon a general charge of disaffection raked up, from every circumstance of his private life, and every expression of his unguarded moments. In such circumstances what individual can be secure? or what can be more illegal and oppressive than a trial conducted on such principles? Good God! sir, is it possible that this can be the law of Scotland? If it be, it ought not to continue one hour longer; and although the lord advocate insinuated as if he thought the same system ought to be introduced into England, yet, he was not afraid that Englishmen would ever suffer such a violation of the spirit of our salutary laws. If ever a minister dared to recommend it, he would find a manly resistance to the measure. Mr. Sheridan concluded that there was one circumstance, which, though not entering into the subject matter of debate, he could not avoid stating to the house. An honourable and worthy member had, upon a former night,

stated, with motives that no doubt did honour to his feelings, an insinuation respecting the sanity of the faculties of Mr. Palmer. This unfortunate gentleman, now on board the vessel which is to convey him to Botany Bay, had, in a letter which he held in his hand, declared that not all the severities of his unmerited fate had touched him so sensibly as this imputation; and he earnestly desired that it might be understood, that in the petition which he had offered to that house and to the foot of the throne, he had demanded justice, not implored mercy. The mistake had probably arisen from the circumstance of there being a brother of this gentleman, a clergyman, who laboured under the misfortune mistakenly, and no doubt kindly, attributed to him.

*The house divided—for the motion 32; against it 171.*

MARCH 14.

FOREIGN TROOPS.

*Mr. Grey called the attention of the house to the subject of which he had given notice—the question of the prerogative of the crown to land foreign troops in this country without the consent of parliament. He concluded with saying, that in order that the proceeding of this night might go down to posterity, to be judged of by them, he should desire that extracts of the bill of rights, the mutiny bill, and acts of parliament might be read: which being done, he moved, "That leave be given to bring in a bill for indemnifying all persons who shall have advised his Majesty to order the landing of any foreign troops that may now be in this country," &c.*

MR. SHERIDAN observed, that a learned gentleman (Mr. Anstruther) at the opposite side of the house, did not condescend to answer a single argument offered by the learned serjeant, (Adair), but was content with answering facts supposed to have been stated. The learned gentleman had discovered there was something beautiful in truth, and took great delight in overthrowing those falsehoods of which he was himself the author. This was a novel and ingenious mode of arguing, and he could not explain the learned gentleman's motive for having recourse to it, except it was to show his skill and expertness in reply. Mr. Sheridan contended that, as it was a breach of the law to advise the king to dissolve the parliament, much greater illegality must attach to the conduct of those who advised him to land foreign troops in this kingdom, without the approbation of the commons, inasmuch as the one was a trifling circumstance, compared to the magnitude and danger of the other. It had been





stated, that the address of both houses of parliament was a sufficient indemnity, and was strictly legal and constitutional. But if a bill of indemnity was deemed necessary with respect to the violation of the corn laws, how much more necessary was such a bill, as far as it regarded the landing a foreign army in the country? There was one distinction, he affirmed, which rendered a precedent absolutely desirable on the present question. The executive power was created for the benefit of the people governed; and that precedent could not be a bad one which was for the benefit of the people; and he should be concerned to hear it laid down as an axiom, that, in proportion to the abuse of the executive power, were the representatives of the people incapacitated from exerting their rights, in order to prevent an unconstitutional stretch of the prerogative of the crown. He was a friend to just prerogative, but the parliament had rights to maintain tantamount to every other consideration; and if once they were tamely to suffer the assumed exercise of any one prerogative of the crown, that moment they sealed the death warrant of the constitution. If it was argued that his Majesty had the power of landing foreign troops in this kingdom, without the previous consent of parliament, and that argument was admitted, that moment the liberties of the country were overthrown. It had been said, there was no declaration against the king introducing foreigners into the kingdom, and of course the measure was not illegal. But here, he would insist, the dignity of parliament was called upon to resist any insinuation; for when Solon had been told, that in his code of laws, there was no punishment against a son who had murdered his father, he replied, it was because he could not conceive the possibility of perpetrating a crime so monstrous. The argument he adduced from this observation was, that the contemplation of a measure of such magnitude as that of landing foreign troops at the pleasure of the sovereign—a measure which might at once annihilate the liberties of the people, was such as did not come within the contemplation of our lawgivers, as a thing far above the puny restrictions of a statute, a thing too monstrous to be thought necessary to be recognized by any act of parliament. His hon. friend, he remarked, who had made the motion, had said, that the introduction of foreign troops was against an express law of the country; but this was considering in too narrow a point of view the act of settlement, and he

would, therefore, take it on the broad basis of being too monstrous to be admitted in a free country. He was not surprised to hear those gentlemen who had recommended themselves to the minister by their apostacy, support the measure; but he was astonished that the old friends of that right hon. gentleman did not revolt at the idea, who were sensible, from experience, how fatal the introduction of strangers to support a minister might be to themselves, by monopolizing all their places. [Here Mr. Sheridan is supposed to have alluded to Mr. Anstruther and some other gentlemen.] He next adverted to Lord Stafford, a man eminent for his abilities, and for his protection of the rights of the people against the encroachments of the crown, and equally notorious with others for his shameless apostacy. When he commanded an army against Scotland, he was told the law made it illegal; but what was his reply? That he would hang any lawyer who dared tell him so. When he recollected that memorable speech, he was aware of the arguments to which gentlemen on the other side of the house would have recourse, were he to mention the situation in which he considered the Hessians, who were the subject of the night's debate. If he was a magistrate, destitute of those tender attachments which gentlemen of that description generally manifest to those in power, he should not hesitate to disperse those foreigners as an illegal and tumultuous rabble. He denied their being a legal army. The mutiny act, he insisted, did not attach to them, and they were not of course recognised by the civil power. It has been said by an hon. member (Mr. T. Grenville) that he conceived, in case of invasion, his Majesty might bring foreign troops from Ostend for the protection of this country in case of danger; and that his Majesty's ministers ought to be impeached if they did not advise him to that measure. He was of opinion that the observation should have due weight with the house, as a descent on the country may not be improbable, if gentlemen candidly considered in what manner our navy was employed. At present a large portion of the navy was assisting at the reduction of Corsica, while our trade was neglected, and captures made daily in the Mediterranean, and even in our own channel. The hon. member had asked if parliament would, in such a case, impeach the king's ministers for advising him to introduce foreigners into this kingdom? To this he would answer, though he had no objection to



vote for a bill of indemnity, for a meritorious violation of the law, still he would not be the last to move for their impeachment for leaving the country in a situation so defenceless. If, he said, such a procedure was to take place, he would not answer for the spirit of the country; for, if the people were to see the kingdom over-run by a band of foreign mercenaries, there existed still that energy among Englishmen that they would, however they may despise the French, follow their example, and rise as an armed nation, rather than submit to the consequences which must inevitably follow, by an army of foreigners being suffered, on any pretence, to land in the country. If it were the wish of the king to land such force, he maintained that any construction which could be put on the bill of rights was a paltry consideration, compared to the consequences which must result from such a measure. He did not wish to speak of any particular sovereign, when he asserted that kings in general thirsted for power, and their ministers were seldom known to resist propositions which had for their object extension of the authority of those princes from whom they derived their influence. The militia act enjoins, he observed, that if the domestic force of the country was necessary to be called out, that the circumstance should, as soon as convenient, be submitted to the house. But if, in an interval of parliament, 50,000 foreign troops were to land in the kingdom, who would assert that the responsibility of the minister was a sufficient apology for the measure? For my part, observed Mr. Sheridan, I should not be very forward in moving an act of impeachment against a gentleman at the head of 50,000 men. It was ridiculous to say, that a previous notice of the measure was a sufficient security, as, while the members were speaking *pro* and *con* on the business, the lobby of the house might be filled with foreign mercenaries. Mr. Sheridan next adverted to the stress laid on the precedent of 1784. At that time, it had been mentioned, that ministers had introduced foreign mercenaries without the consent of parliament, and that then no bill of indemnity was required; but this was unnecessary, as the house had voted that his Majesty's ministers had forfeited the confidence of the public. In certain cases, he did not conceive it wise or good policy to tie up the hands of the executive power. But there were certain principles in a free constitution from which the house should never depart. It was true, that by the voting of

the army and navy estimates, the exposure of our finances and other circumstances might be attended with some inconvenience; yet, when the inestimable advantages which spring from keeping the spirit of the constitution inviolate were put into the opposite scale, there was no member in the house who would not say, that the constitution of the country should be held sacred, and a trifling revelation did not obscure the valuable privileges which resulted from it, when its other forms were impartially contemplated. Mr. Sheridan concluded by giving his hearty approbation to the motion of his hon. friend.

*The house divided—for the motion 41 ; against it 170.*

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MARCH 21.

VOLUNTARY AIDS FOR RAISING TROOPS WITHOUT THE CONSENT OF PARLIAMENT.

MR. SHERIDAN asked the chancellor of the exchequer if the measure which had been lately published relative to the recommending the raising of troops by subscription, to be opened by the lord-lieutenants of different counties, came from the secretary of state? and if so, whether the right hon. gentleman had any objection to laying that communication before the house? He should suppose there could be no objection to this. Indeed, it was a point that required no argument, as he conceived. Nothing could be clearer than that a proposition from the executive power, to any quarter whatever, for the raising of troops, ought and must be laid before parliament; nor anything more decidedly unconstitutional, than that there should be any measure whatever carried on for the raising an army, without the immediate knowledge of the house of commons. All that he wanted now to know was, whether this communication was to be laid before the house as a matter of course? if not, he must move for it.

*Mr. Pitt said, the communication alluded to was not a plan for raising troops; if it had been, that communication should have been laid before parliament, but the whole was nothing more than a measure by which ministers might be enabled to digest a plan which, when digested, should be laid before the house, and which he should do on the first practical opportunity. Estimates were actually prepared, and would be ready, he believed, to be presented to the house on Monday next. With regard to the paper of communication to the lord-lieutenants, he could not agree that it should be produced, and what he had said already would show there was no necessity for producing it, for that paper only went to the question in what*



*shape the estimates should be laid before parliament. It was only a communication to form a plan, which plan of itself had no authority before it received the sanction of parliament. He had not an idea that a single man should be raised, or a single shilling levied, without the express consent of parliament; but after parliament had sanctioned the measure, he hoped there would be no impropriety in any individual voluntarily contributing what he pleased towards supporting the militia. It was notorious this had been done in almost every former war in which Great Britain had been engaged.*

Mr. Sheridan said, he had not heard anything like a reason why this communication should not be laid before the house; there was no time to be lost on so important a subject as this. That there should even have been a proposition from the crown to levy money on the people, in any manner, under any pretence whatever, without the express consent of the house of commons, excited his astonishment; and, therefore, he should have a motion to make on this subject on Monday next.

BILL FOR IMPOSING AN ADDITIONAL DUTY ON PAPER.

*On reading the report of the committee on this bill, Mr. Brandling observed, that he had instructions from his constituents to state, that the duty now proposed on the lower class of paper would amount, in point of fact, to three times the sum proposed by the chancellor of the exchequer, and that it would be extremely oppressive. He did not know whether this was true or not, but he thought it would be but fair that his constituents should have an opportunity of proving what they alleged if they could, and for that reason he moved that this bill be re-committed.*

Mr. Sheridan said, that from what he had heard, he thought this bill ought to be re-committed. He considered that, in its present form, it would never answer any good purpose to the revenue. Indeed, bills of this kind were almost always passed through the house without receiving an adequate attention; and he hoped to see the day when that negligence should not be suffered, and when every revenue bill, without exception, should be printed, for there were none which required more attention. It appeared extraordinary, indeed, that fine paper, used by the higher ranks of life for their amusing and elegant correspondence, should be charged about fourteen per cent. additional duty by this bill; and that the most useful and cheap communication of intelligence should be charged between forty and fifty per cent. ! This, if persisted in, would amount to a prohibition of almost all the cheap circulation of intelligence. On newspapers, for instance, the duty would have the effect which he had stated; but he hoped they would be allowed a drawback on the stamp equal to

the amount of the additional duty. There was another circumstance which he could not help mentioning, because it would be necessary for him to introduce a clause to prevent such scandalous abuse of the revenue laws. There was a mill for the manufactory of paper to a great extent in this country, in which the forgery of French assignats was carried on. The excise officer who attends this mill, doubted whether he could suffer this sort of proceeding to pass; and on making the necessary communications, he received what appeared to him to be sufficient authority for superintending this, as if it had been the regular and honest manufacture of paper in the way of trade. He did not state this upon a loose hearsay—he could give the name of the mill, if necessary. He thought it highly important for government to disavow, by its ministers, any share in such a scandalous proceeding.

*Mr. Pitt said, that information from those who committed forgery was not the best to be relied on.*

Mr. Sheridan said, that the answer of the chancellor of the exchequer was in fact nothing. He stated this to have been done at a public paper mill in this country; and that the excise officer, who superintended the manufacture of the mill, had what appeared to him to be good authority for passing it by; and it was essential to the honour of government that all this should be cleared up; which should be his object another day.

*The motion for the re-commitment was negatived, and the resolutions of the committee agreed to.*

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MARCH 24.

ALIEN BILL.

*Mr. Thompson moved, "That there be laid before the house a list of all foreigners who have been ordered to quit this country under the power of the alien bill."*

MR. SHERIDAN desired the question might be read; which being done, he observed, that the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) who opposed the motion (whether he attended to it or not, he would not pretend to say) did not seem properly to understand the meaning of it, because he agreed to the propriety of concealing the circumstances of each particular case, and of giving ministers credit for their motives in acting under this bill. Such observations would come better, when the motion should be followed up by something that might call for that sort of vindica-



tion ; the case was not so at present. He then proceeded to show that this confidence, as affirmed by the secretary of state, might be abused by inferior officers, as he had reason, indeed, to think was the case, and had waited on the right hon. gentleman, from whom he had the greatest attention and civility, as well as redress to the objects for whom he interfered, and for which he begged the secretary of state to accept his personal thanks. This, however, proved that abuses had taken place, and may be repeated ; to prevent which the list moved for might have some effect. He could not agree with the right hon. gentleman, that it was improper to publish the names of those whom we thought too suspicious in character to remain with us ; this was paying a bad compliment to all our allies (which, by the way, was nearly all Europe) in the war against France ; but this proved that we had not made the cause so common a cause as was once imagined, and he was glad of it. The abuse of power under this bill, he must again repeat, ought to be an object of investigation, that it might be avoided in future. Some persons had been ordered away as suspicious, who had, on farther inquiry, been found subjects good enough to be naturalized by act of parliament. He did not wish this question to be pressed to a division, but he hoped the discussion would be followed by one good effect—that ministers would be more cautious than they have been, as to the orders they give for persons to quit the kingdom.

*The motion was then put and negatived.*

VOLUNTARY AIDS FOR RAISING TROOPS WITHOUT THE CONSENT  
OF PARLIAMENT.

Mr. Sheridan, in pursuance of the motion he gave on Friday, proceeded to call the attention of the house to the subject of raising troops in this country by subscription. It would not be necessary for him to enter into any arguments, at present, on the general question, since he had learned, after coming into the house to-day, the right hon. the chancellor of the exchequer had made good use of the interval that had elapsed between the motion to be made to-day and the notice of making it. He had benefitted by the lesson of prudence given to him on another occasion (the petition of Mr. Palmer), and now he understood the paper was to be granted, and therefore nothing more need be said on that subject now, and more particularly as this matter must be discussed

hereafter. But it appeared to him proper to say a few words on points which arose out of this question, and very materially connected with it. Generally speaking, any interference of this sort was called by ministers and their advocates, an improper interference with the affairs of government. He wished to see the kingdom (as he hoped and trusted every man in it did) put into a state of defence equal to the danger; and now the more so, if the rumour was true, that we had lost the aid of one of the great powers in the alliance; for it was now confidently stated that the great monarch alluded to had actually withdrawn himself altogether from the common cause against France;—the more so still, from the abominable negligence of ministers with regard to the safety of our coast; for at this very moment there was a party of the enemy who had landed on our coast, and had committed devastations in Northumberland. He was persuaded that, notwithstanding all the obloquy cast on the gentlemen on that side of the house by certain interested persons, they would be found to unite in the most earnest desire of preserving the interest of the country as well, perhaps better, than those who boasted so much of their patriotism, and who in truth seemed to recede from duty, in proportion to their boasting of the manner in which they performed it. This seemed to be the case in the instance he alluded to; for when the enemy was plundering in part in Northumberland, the mayor of Newcastle was sent to for assistance; the answer was, that the force he had was not adequate to the purpose for which it was wanted. Having said this, to prove that ministers were not remarkably careful of our coast, he must say a word or two on the manner they had endeavoured to proceed in open violation of the constitution. He did not mean to debate the subject at length now, because another day was to be taken up with that discussion, but he would say, “that an application from ministers, to any body of men, for the raising a voluntary contribution towards supporting any military power in this country, is wholly and perfectly illegal and unconstitutional.” He should say nothing about precedent either, for he believed there was not any that came up to the point now before parliament. There was, at this moment, a body of men deliberating on the best mode of raising men, and of paying them when raised, independent of the parliament of this country; and this too, not merely in consequence of a voluntary act of their’s, but from the



express requisition of the secretary of state: and this was followed up by an advertisement in the public papers, worded in a manner that seemed to indicate, that those who do not join it have views that are hostile to the constitution of the country. Of that character, and to that effect, was the advertisement in Surrey, desiring a meeting at Kingston on the 27th of this month. [Here he read the advertisement.] He might, and he ventured to say should be told, that it was not the intention of ministers to put these troops under pay until the plan of raising them, and the mode of paying them, shall receive the sanction of parliament. But why was parliament passed by in this business in any stage of it? Why did ministers resort to lord-lieutenants and grand juries instead of the house of commons, the only place to which they could legally and constitutionally resort? If, for instance, he was to go to this Kingston meeting and ask these gentlemen what they were about, they would answer him, "Oh, you are a mere member of the house of commons, you know nothing of this business as yet; when we have settled the whole of the plan it shall be laid before you by the secretary of state, and he will explain what we have determined upon; that is the readiest way of proceeding;" and then the ministers would do nothing more than bring in a bill of indemnity, for raising troops and paying them without the interference of the house of commons. He should say no more now on this subject; he should only move, "That an humble address be presented to his Majesty, praying that he will be graciously pleased to give directions, that there be laid before this house a copy of the letter dated Whitehall, the 14th of March, to the lord-lieutenants of several counties, together with all plans and other proceedings proposed thereon."

*Towards the close of the debate,*

Mr. Sheridan in reply said, that nothing which had fallen from gentlemen on the other side of the house, or from his learned friend (Mr. Adair), could induce him to relinquish the discussion upon this subject; that it was by no means to be considered an abstract question, which had been viciously brought forward to agitate the existence of a right before such right had been violated; but it was to restrain the farther violation of a right already infringed upon. There was a public meeting called for this purpose by the sheriff for the county of Surrey. He thought the house should take some part in the business. He did not intend

to propose that a deputation of members should be sent to assist in their deliberations, but the serjeant-at-arms should attend, and bring Lord Onslow and Mr. Bowles to the bar of the house to answer for their conduct. With regard to the notice given by the minister, he was of opinion that he had not given any which could be noticed in a parliamentary manner. The worthy magistrate (Sir James Saunderson) confessed the measure should have originated in that house, yet, in the same breath he said, he should have considered an account of some subscriptions at a country meeting a due notice. He adverted to the neglect of the coast; the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) had said the French must always have a force in the North seas, and we must be liable to such accidents; the same may be said of the south coast; he did not think the port of Shields the proper place for stationing a force, but along the coast from Shields to Leith. He conceived the learned serjeant had not displayed his usual discrimination upon the present occasion. He could not answer whether such a clause as he proposed would be brought forward; and if it should, it would only operate as a bill of indemnity, and gentlemen had already shown a strong dislike to the apprehended disgrace of such a bill. But as he understood there was a message to be delivered from his Majesty to-morrow, and which he supposed would be followed up with an address (though of late every message did not require an answer, the communication being considered sufficient), he would propose an amendment to that address, upon which the legality of the conduct of ministers in the present case might be fully discussed.

*The motion was put and carried nem. con.*

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MARCH 26.

MESSAGE FROM THE KING.—INVASION.

*A message from his Majesty was delivered this day to the house, purporting the intention of the enemy to invade the kingdom, and requiring the necessary succours to oppose them by increasing the militia; and informing it at the same time, that relying on its concurrence, the king had issued orders to that purpose. A corresponding address was moved by Mr. Dundas, to assure the king of the readiness of the house to concur in all the measures requisite for the prosecution of the war as just and necessary.*

MR. SHERIDAN adverted to the particular situation in which he was placed by this address; and after what had fallen from



his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox), he wished to be perfectly understood. There were two points before the house that were distinct and separate. There was nothing in the message from the king, or in the address now moved in answer to it, that had any reference whatever to the papers now upon the table, with regard to the communication of the secretary of state to the lord-lieutenants of the counties; and, therefore, he should agree to it. He should abstain too from making the motion of which he had given notice upon that subject, if he found that ministers had thought better on the subject of subscriptions; and had taken this public, fair, and constitutional mode of calling for the aid of the country to the executive power. But if he found that they had not abandoned that plan, and that this measure was not to be understood as a proof that they had retracted their opinions, he should be under the necessity of making the motion of which he had given notice.

*In reply to some observations from Mr. Pitt,*

Mr. Sheridan expressed his astonishment that what he had said before could have been so palpably misrepresented. He had said that he would not oppose the address, although he disapproved of calling the war just and necessary. He had also said, that if ministers would declare that they had given up their plan of soliciting subscriptions, he would give up the motion which he intended to make on the subject. Surely there was no connection between making or not making that motion, and voting for the address. After what he had heard, he should think it his duty to make the motion when the papers were printed; and as far as argument and authority could be relied upon, he should prove that the measure was a misdemeanour on the part of ministers and on the part of all who assisted them in it.

*The address was voted without a division.*

BILL FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT AND DISCIPLINE OF SUCH CORPS AND COMPANIES AS SHOULD VOLUNTARILY ENROL THEMSELVES FOR THE DEFENCE OF TOWNS ON THE SEA COASTS, OR FOR THE GENERAL DEFENCE OF THE COUNTRY AT LARGE DURING THE PRESENT WAR.

*Mr. Pitt moved for leave to bring in this bill.*

Mr. Sheridan observed, that the right hon. gentleman had

formerly stated, that these corps were then meant to be under martial law ; and he had also observed that the present bill was intended to be similar to that of 1782. According to that bill, the volunteer companies were not to be subject to martial law but in case of actual invasion ; and were authorised to make rules and regulations among themselves for the direction of their conduct. He therefore wished to know, whether the present volunteer corps were meant to be put under martial law, except in case of invasion ? He said, it was extremely material that that point should be clearly and distinctly understood.

*Mr. Pitt said, it was intended that the corps should be subject to martial law whenever they should be called out ; and that they might be called out on something short of an invasion.*

*Leave was then given to bring in this bill, and Mr. Pitt and Mr. Secretary Dundas were ordered to prepare and bring in the same.*

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MARCH 28.

BILL FOR AUGMENTING THE FORCE OF THE KINGDOM, &c.

*Upon the motion for this bill being committed Mr. Fox observed, that there appeared to him a circumstance in it worthy the attention of the house. He alluded to the words in the bill, which were "on the appearance of an invasion." He thought that this was giving to the executive government a dangerous and almost an unlimited power.*

MR. SHERIDAN apprehended that, as the bill now stood, with the words "appearance of invasion," all the troops under this bill would be liable to be called out almost under any pretence. He thought that this might deter many persons from enrolling themselves, and, therefore, might defeat the real good purposes of the bill. He wished the bill had been a mere transcript of the bill of 1782, which the chancellor of the exchequer proposed to take for his model. What was meant by the appearance of invasion ? There was at present the appearance of invasion, from the king's message ; the probability of an invasion was a very different thing, and on which he confessed he had no alarming apprehensions. But he was afraid that this vague expression, "the appearance of invasion," would stand in the way of the voluntary service which the chancellor of the exchequer professed, by this bill, to endeavour to encourage ; because it went to the subjecting men to military discipline unnecessarily, and on uncertain grounds. He feared, that by this bill, all the fencibles or volunteer corps might be subjected to military dis-



cipline for the whole remainder of the war, if any lord-lieutenant or sheriff of a county should happen to call them out once to suppress any internal tumult or disturbance; this, he conceived, might operate to prevent many from enlisting, who might be enrolled, if they were assured that they would not be under such military discipline until an invasion, or actual rebellion, took place.

*To this Mr. Pitt observed, that these persons would not be under military law or discipline until they actually marched under arms; to this they did not subject themselves at the time of being enrolled—but it was to be stated to them before they actually marched, and then being subject to military law was only to be the consequence of a specific agreement entered into by themselves. This was provided in the bill, and he hoped the hon. gentleman when he came to employ his ingenuity on this subject again, would not do it to excite any alarm in the public mind, and produce an effect which might tend to prevent any persons from enrolling in this corps for assistance for our internal defence. He hoped, in future, that gentleman would employ his ingenuity rather to remove than to infuse doubts.*

Mr. Sheridan said, that his object was to deal fairly with the people of this country, by telling them the real situation they were to be placed in. Ingenuity, he had no doubt, they would naturally enough expect from the chancellor of the exchequer; and he would supply them copiously with that article, but what they would chiefly require was a little plain dealing.

*The bill was ordered to be committed for Monday next.*

VOLUNTARY AIDS FOR PUBLIC PURPOSES WITHOUT THE CONSENT  
OF PARLIAMENT.

Mr. Sheridan said, that in bringing forward the subject of the demand which had been made by his Majesty's ministers, of a benevolence from the people, he should be obliged to trouble them at considerable length; and he hoped that he should be indulged with their attention. The proposition which he intended to make, was so congenial with the spirit of the constitution, so necessary to its maintenance in the purity in which it had been handed down to us by our ancestors, so essential to the security of the people, and to the very existence of parliament, that in his opinion, it wanted only to be heard in order to be generally received. The demand made by government and addressed to different lord-lieutenants, was of the greatest importance in every light in which it could be viewed: and its importance was increased by the circumstance by which it was

accompanied ; for the right hon. gentleman had chosen to persist in the measure which had been adopted, in such a way as to make it evident that he rather acted for the sake of establishing the principle, than from any motive of immediate advantage to the state. He would have been happy to have put off the discussion if, even after the first mention of it in that house, the right hon. gentleman had thought proper to come forward, in any fair and constitutional mode, to apply for a parliamentary sanction of this most alarming measure. But it seemed, through the whole of his recent conduct, to be his first desire, in the ostentation of his power, to increase the prerogative of the crown ; and in the choice of means, to give the preference uniformly to that which contradicted some established usage, violated some fundamental principle, or demolished some constitutional fence. This was the case in the landing of foreign troops in this country. If he had chosen to apply to parliament for their sanction, no one will say that a doubt would have arisen, or the smallest hesitation have taken place, about granting an immediate sanction to their entry into the kingdom. But he disdained all such application. Anxious to establish the precedent that the crown could, at its pleasure, introduce any number of foreign troops into this country, he contemned all indemnity, and put it upon the footing of prerogative. And thus, in the same manner, with a parliament sitting ; a parliament certainly who had shown themselves not indisposed to comply with any measure proposed by the right hon. gentleman,—instead of coming down to state and desire the farther aids which might be necessary for the defence of the country, an application was made, through the secretary of state, to the lord-lieutenants of counties, to instigate a subscription, and levy a sum of money among the people, not subject to the control of parliament, nor even within its cognizance. When this extraordinary proceeding was noticed in parliament, it was at length thought proper to bring down a message from the crown. He even then hoped that in that message words would have been introduced, and a proceeding taken upon it, which would have made his present motion unnecessary. He had hoped that the right hon. gentleman would have felt it to be his duty to call upon parliament to authorize the proceeding ; and even this, though a tardy and ungracious mode of conduct, he should have been happy to



have seen; and he should not, in such case, have thought it necessary to submit to the house the motion which he held in his hand. But, in this message, not the slightest application was made for any authority or sanction of the proceeding. All that he had done was, to bring in a bill to put under certain regulations the men to be levied by the money so to be subscribed. The question for the house to consider this day was, whether the people had a right to offer and to give, and whether the crown had a right to receive a supply or subscription for public purposes, without the knowledge and consent of parliament?—this question involved in it no less than, whether the crown could maintain a force, and carry on the executive government of the country, independent of the parliament thereof? He averred, and should endeavour to prove, first, that it was against the reason of things, and against the first principles of a mixed government, and of a representative system; and, consequently, not reconcilable either with the spirit or the letter of our constitution for the crown to possess such power. Secondly, that it was not consistent with the ancient and sound usages of the country, conformable to the best authorities, or to be reconciled with the custom of the kingdom in good times; and thirdly, that even if it was consistent with the usages, and might be countenanced by authorities, that it was not a wise course, nor fit to be resorted to as a source of revenue for the security of this kingdom. These doctrines were clear to his mind; but if he should be able to make any one of them obvious and manifest to the house, it was enough for the purpose of his motion. As to the first, namely, that it was against the reason of things that such power should exist in the crown,—he would say, that there could be no true security for public liberty, excepting on this ground, that the crown can neither take nor use property to any public purpose without the previous consent of parliament. It was not the boasted liberty of Englishmen merely, that property was secured to them, but that no property, however it might come into the hands of the crown, could be applied to any possible purpose, except such as had been previously authorized by parliament. It was not then simply the boast of our freedom, and the basis of our security, that the crown could not take money out of our pockets; but that the people cannot, by any act of indiscreet benevolence, present their money to the crown,

excepting through the channel of parliament. For, suppose that was otherwise, and the grand juries, corporate bodies, county meetings, and other assemblies, could, at their pleasure, present sums of money to the crown, to be used at pleasure—parliament must become from that moment unnecessary; the king would have the means of employing this money to purposes not previously explained; for it was the peculiar office and duty of parliament to square and adapt the grant of money to the special purpose, and to see that no sums were put into the disposal of the executive government, which were not to be appropriated to a purpose which they had previously judged necessary. If grand juries and county meetings could not then, with safety to the constitution, grant such sums of their own accord, how much more alarming must it be if a supply of this kind was to be demanded of them by the crown, and to be granted upon such demand? What must be the situation of the country, if the crown could at pleasure appeal, not to parliament, but to knots and selected societies of individuals, and procure supplies for purposes unknown and unexplained to the legal representatives of the people? It was possible that a moment of delusion might arise when, by exerting all the influence of the crown, and adding to it all the quackery of cant words, and of inflammatory appeals to their passions, the people might be brought into a temper to grant supplies, even when the parliament had refused them.

He might mention an instance within all their recollections. In the year 1784, many persons were of opinion that the house of commons should have refused the supplies, as the best means of resisting the unconstitutional attack that was then made on the privileges of the house. He, for one, was against the measure; but it certainly would not be denied, that if at that time it had been adopted, the people of the kingdom were, by the artful delusion and cry of a fourth estate, and of a monstrous coalition, brought into a temper to have granted a supply to the crown, and that in such a way as to have made all the functions and purposes of parliament unnecessary to the crown. The East India Company would, no doubt, have been ready to come forward with their £500,000 or £1,000,000, and a sum at least equal to that annual grant, which the wisdom of their ancestors had thought fit to reserve in the hands of parliament, as the best



security for all their other privileges, would have been raised against that very coalition, a great part of which was now revered as the most splendid support of the very vitals of the constitution. They would have subscribed against all that was great and glorious—against the person who was now at the head of the law—and against those who had thought that nothing could preserve the liberties of this kingdom inviolate, but involving the nation in the present most blessed and advantageous war. If the counties of England were to be left to assess themselves, and that they distributed the order for the sum which each district should raise—a means by which still the crown would obtain money by the consent of the people, and by which at least the constitution would not be apparently injured, the measure would still be contrary to all sound policy and to the spirit of our system: for it would abolish parliaments; it would render the king independent of that watchful body whom the power of the purse alone made formidable, and in consequence of which power they were able to obtain the redress of all other grievances. What would be the consequence if this power of the purse was not vested solely in parliament? All the privileges possessed by the people would fall at once to the ground, for they were inseparably connected with the assembling and sitting of parliament. The king was not bound to call a parliament at specific times; but if he should neglect to call one for three years together, it was appointed that they should meet by the authority of the people. Would the house see the great and strong fence of all their liberties, the power of the purse, invaded in the slightest manner? and would they say that we had any sensible practicable security for any one privilege, if the crown had resources independent of the people? The question might be asked—Whether the crown could make use, for any public purpose, of money derived from private resources? He had no hesitation in saying, that it would be an overturning of the whole constitution if the king could employ any funds to a purpose not authorized by parliament. He went to the whole extent of this principle: if the throne of England had devolved to the house of Bourbon, would it have been a sufficient security to Englishmen, that the King of Great Britain, being also the King of France, could not apply the immense sums which he might have drawn from that flourishing kingdom, to any purpose in England, unauthorized by the par-

liament of England? Would it have been sufficient for them to say, "our liberties are safe because you cannot put your hand into our pockets?" No: it was seen and felt that there could be no security for the liberties of England if the King of England could draw resources from another kingdom, of so immense a kind as to render him superior to the power of the purse in the hands of their own parliament. They had not the same fear with respect to the Elector of Hanover, because no resources could be drawn from that place dangerous to British liberty. The principle, however, had ever been present to the minds of men, and both in committing the hereditary revenue which the king drew from the colonies, and also in settling the constitution of Ireland, care had been taken that the crown should not have the means of drawing into his hands sums that might be injurious to the country. One of the most plausible arguments that was used for the American war, and the only one indeed which could tend to give it popularity, was, that by giving to the parliament the power of taxing America, they would take out of the hands of the crown the revenue which America might voluntarily grant without the cognizance of parliament. In regard to contributions, it was ridiculous to say that they were voluntary: there was no such thing as a pure voluntary subscription, when that subscription was to be made for the crown. If this was true even in the time of James I., how much more so must it be at this time now, when the officers of customs and excise, placemen, pensioners, and dependents upon the crown, were greater in number than all the constituent body of the kingdom, certainly more in number than that part of the people who nominated and returned a majority of that house? Would it be said then that, when the influence of the crown had come to such a height, and when that influence was so strenuously exerted, when all the arts of intrigue were added to the menaces of power, that a subscription demanded by the crown could be said to be voluntary? He would venture to say, that not one in twenty was a free voluntary subscriber. The extent to which the principle might be driven was pretty well exemplified in the late meeting at Berwick, a meeting which he did not hesitate to pronounce illegal, and which could only be aggravated by its being founded upon an application from the minister. At this meeting they had resolved to raise two troops of horse for their defence, which should be at



the disposal of the crown, to go to any part of Great Britain. To defray this expense they resolved upon a kind of land tax, by which they imposed a levy amounting to eight months of their annual cessment. Regretting, however, that they could not at once extend this to the property of those who were absent, they drew up an application to them, by which they stigmatize all who shall refuse to subscribe. The only plea that could be urged in favour of this proceeding was, that though the money was subscribed, yet it was not to be applied in any other manner than by consent of parliament. Now, he called upon any one to produce a single law by which it could be proved, that where it was lawful for the people on one hand to subscribe, and for the crown, on the other, to receive it, it was equally lawful for the parliament to direct the application of it. But suppose the legality of such interference demonstrable, might it not be rendered nugatory by the danger of waiting for such an application in the pressure of present and imminent difficulties? Thus, on the subject of landing foreign troops, it was contended that there existed no danger, because ministers, in doing so, were at the same time bound to give notice thereof to the house. Neither in that, nor the present instance, could any law bearing such construction or necessity be produced; on the contrary, if it was legal for the king to accept, it was equally so for him to apply the benevolences which might be granted. But he asserted that there was nothing contained in the statutes to justify any other grants than those made by parliament; but that the direct contrary was deducible from them all; to prove which, he took a review of the different periods in which the business of benevolences were agitated. The first instance we had of benevolence was in the time of Edward IV. The next was in the case of Pym in the 4th James I., upon his resisting the payment of certain duties levied without the consent of parliament. The arguments used upon this occasion fully established the point—though not the principal one in discussion—that the king had no right to such means of support. It was true that this only marked compulsory benevolence; but that was the evil felt, and to remedy which, they of that day particularly turned their minds. Compulsory gifts were one offence, and gifts, however free, were another, and no less a breach of the privileges of that house than the other; and, therefore, however he might seem to jest the other day, he was

perfectly justifiable, when he said the sergeant at arms ought to be sent to arrest the chairman who should subscribe to the resolutions of a meeting, violating those privileges by granting a supply.

The next case in point of order, after the petition of right, was the case in 1715, of Mr. Oliver St. John, who, on account of a letter which he wrote to the mayor of Marlborough, was prosecuted in the star chamber, on the 15th of April, 1715. In this letter Mr. Oliver St. John stated the objections which he had to this kind of benevolence; first, he said, "it was not only without, but against reason, that the commons, in their several particulars, should be relievers or suppliers of his Majesty's wants, who neither know his wants nor the sums that may be raised to supply them. Secondly, it was against reason that the particular and several commons distracted, should oppose their judgment and discretion to the judgment and discretion of the land assembled in parliament, who had there denied any such aid." Mr. St. John farther said, "That some for fear, some in pride, some to please others, would enter into this contribution; and he stated it to be against the constitution, and a violation of the great and solemn oath taken by the king at his coronation, for the maintaining of the laws, liberties, and customs of this noble realm." For this letter Mr. Oliver St. John was prosecuted in the star chamber, and his sentence was to be fined £5000 and to be imprisoned for life. The great Sir Francis Bacon was then attorney-general, and the speech he made upon that trial was most memorable. He defended the measure of benevolence to the crown by most extraordinary arguments:—"God forbid," said Sir Francis, "any body should be so wretched as to think that the obligation of love and duty from the subject to the king should be joint and not several. No, my lords, it is both: the subject petitioneth to the king in parliament; he petitioneth likewise out of parliament. The king, on the other side, gives graces to the subject in parliament; he gives them likewise, and poureth them upon his people out of parliament; and so, no doubt, the subject may give to the king, in parliament, and out of parliament." Sir Francis goes on, "that it was thought fit, by the lords in council, to make a proof of the love and attachment of the country; and they devised and directed letters unto the sheriffs and justices, declaring what had been done here



in London, and wishing the country might be moved, especially men of value:" and Sir Francis, in the course of his argument, defended the measure, because it was to work upon example as a thing not devised, or projected, or required; no, not so much as recommended, until many who were never moved nor dealt with *ex mero motu* had freely and frankly sent in their presents; so that the letters were rather like letters of news of what was done at London, than otherwise; and we know *exempla ducunt non trahunt*; do but lead, they do not draw nor drive. The letter of Henry Dundas was exactly on the model of the letter of the council of James I. Sir Francis's whole argument went upon the idea that this benevolence was not an exaction called a benevolence, and which the Duke of Buckingham spoke of in his oration to the city. His definition of a benevolence was extremely curious; he defined it to be "not what the subject of his good will would give, but what the king of his good will would take." And after these valuable arguments in favour of benevolence, Sir Francis ran through three pages of panegyric on his Majesty, as the greatest warrior, finest writer, most sublime philosopher, most christian monarch, and the handsomest man in Europe; and upon these arguments, as he said, the star chamber fined Mr. Oliver St. John £5000, and condemned him to imprisonment during the king's pleasure. If the star chamber was revived in this country, or if the Scotch law, or rather the practice of the Scotch law, were introduced into this country, then, perhaps, this system of benevolence would have greater success than it was likely to have, as the example of Mr. Oliver St. John might be revived. Which of the two the right hon. and learned gentleman would prefer to introduce, it was not possible for him to conjecture. Mr. Sheridan then came to the statute of the 13th of Charles II. which, in reality, settled the point then under the discussion of the house, for that statute, in its preamble, declared all voluntary aids or benevolences from the people to the crown to be illegal. But, in consideration of the sudden and pressing necessity of the king, it did legalize a benevolence on that one occasion; under very strict limitations, it directed that the subscription of no commoner should exceed the sum of £200, nor that of a peer the sum of £400; it limited the duration of the benevolence, and there was a special provision that this statute should never be drawn in as a precedent for any future occasion.

This statute was the law to this day; no one proceeding in the shape of a law had taken place since that time; for the bill of rights confirmed by inference the 13th of Charles II., though, like the petition of right, it confined itself to benevolences at the requisition of the crown. He could not conceive what possible case they could ground themselves upon since the revolution, what authorities they meant to bring forward, or upon what practice it was their intention to justify their proceeding. The right hon. gentleman had thrown out an insinuation that he had authorities; it would be found with what reason he had ventured to make this assertion. He would venture to say, that in no instance was there a case to be found in anything similar to the present. The example of 1745, when a rebellion was raging in the country, and parliament was not sitting, would surely not be mentioned as a pregnant example. It was one of those cases of extreme necessity which superseded all the usual forms of proceeding, as well as all law: it was a case that struck at the vitals of the constitution, when government would not have merely been justified in taking the aids that were offered, but when they would have been justified if they had gone even to greater lengths, and had, by the proclamation of martial law, put the whole body of the people into arms, and removed the property of individuals from the reach of the common enemy. It was not from a case of such necessity that they ought, therefore, to argue; nor did he conceive that the right hon. gentleman would choose the case of 1756 as the ground of his justification. At that time bounties were offered to such seamen as should enter as volunteers, by the city of London and the other great bodies; and the Earl of Chatham had written a letter of thanks to the city upon the occasion. But would the Earl of Chatham, if he were now alive, adopt, or even countenance, the unprecedented measure of his son? The case of offering bounties, in addition to the bounties given by the crown, was very different from a benevolence to the crown. The money was not given to the king, nor did it come in any shape or manner into the hands of government; it was to be given simply to those individuals who, in consequence of an act of parliament, entered into his Majesty's service, and who had already received the sum directed by parliament. It was a measure which countenanced a measure of parliament, but which did not go farther: it did not add one man to the grant of parliament, but it simply



held forth additional inducements to the country to enter into the service held to be necessary by the parliament. The next instance was that of 1778, and this was of the same sort as the former: parliament was adjourned for the purpose, as it was said, of procuring the additional aids at a time when they were not sitting. During this adjournment, accidental or contrived, certain persons in the city of London, and otherwise, did resolve to raise sums, and to put them under the disposal of a committee for the purpose of buying clothing, &c. But that instance differed from the present in this, that it was not done at the requisition of the crown; that his Majesty's ministers were not seen in it; and that surely was not one of the cases in which the ministers were to find their great authorities? Great authorities were to be found at that time against the measure: a right hon. gentleman, then member for Bristol (Mr. Burke), spoke with his usual splendour against a measure that struck, as he said, at the very foundation of public security.

Another great authority who countenanced the Earl of Chatham in the case of 1756, and whom the right hon. gentleman would not, he conceived, despise upon that account, objected to the measure with that warm zeal for the constitution which had distinguished his honourable life (Earl Camden). The authority of Mr. Dunning and of many other most eminent men was against his Majesty's ministers on a measure that had not half the aggravation of the present. As to the case of 1782, at which the right hon. gentleman seemed to glance on a former night, and which he meant to insinuate was a proof that his right hon. friend had then countenanced the principle of the measure, it was, in his opinion, totally inapplicable; it was, in reality, a measure that might have been deemed, both on account of the time at which it came and of its own nature, to be highly democratic; for, immediately after a letter of the Duke of Richmond, and of his motion for universal suffrage, it was a recommendation to the people to take arms for their own mutual defence, but not putting them into the hands of the crown; it was stating what was undoubtedly constitutional, that, for mutual defence and for general security, it would be wise and prudent for every man to be armed; but it did not recommend that levies should be made for the crown, or that money should be put at the disposal of the crown. He had thus gone through the precedents in the history of

England, and he concluded from them that the present measure was clearly hostile, both to the spirit of the constitution and to all the sound usages of the country. His third proposition, that, even if it could be reconciled with the constitution and with custom, it was still a measure unwise, futile, and unfit to be resorted to, would soon receive a better illustration than any that it could derive from his arguments; for it would soon be seen what would be the result of the present attempt, for there never was a moment so favourable to the experiment as the present. The country had all the motives to a grand display of benevolence that any possible concurrence of events could engender. The expenses of the present year would be at least five and thirty millions sterling, for the payment of the interest of debts and for the maintenance of this most glorious war—a war essential to so many grand objects that it was almost impossible to enumerate them; a war for the salvation of the British constitution and for the safety of kings—a war for the Christian religion—a war for privileges and distinctions—a war for human order—a war for the safety of this country, and for the security of the whole of Europe—a war, in short, in which all the emotions of the soul were to be roused, and in which, if ever it could be expected to draw a great sum from the source of benevolence, the exertion of the people, on the present occasion, was likely to be such as to demonstrate the extent of this species of resource; for, if the people were only to advance their money upon all the inducements which were held out—one pound for religion, one pound for kings, one pound for the British constitution, one pound for human order, what must not be expected from a generous and opulent people? He would be bold to foretel, however, that it would be treated with merited disdain, and that it would be as unproductive as it would be oppressive and odious. Nothing could be more idle, at the same time, than to call it voluntary. When the enormous influence of the crown was considered, running through all its channels of patronage, terror, the revenue laws, the chain of dependance, and all the varieties of aspect under which, to the most distant parts of the kingdom, it entered and pervaded every place, it would be impossible for men to act from their own motion, or to resist the torrent of this prevailing power. Nor could it be considered the most equal mode; since some from ostentation, and more from interest, in the view of deriving advantage from the subscriptions



to be raised by getting rank for their relations, or contracts, or agencies, would be induced to subscribe, not what they could afford, not what could be considered as a genuine resource, but as the aggregate of pride and mercenary spirit for a time, and which could not be resorted to often without fallacy and defeat. It was one of those instances in which the right hon. gentleman mimicked the Jacobins, as, indeed, he mimicked the Jacobins in everything. It was not the smallest of the evils of the present system, that all the miserable follies which we reprobated we were doomed daily to imitate. Instead of displaying a manly and honourable confidence in the loyalty and attachment of the people of this country to the person of the king, and to the system of the constitution, the government set up a dark, gloomy, Jacobinic system of inquisition, destructive of the concord, character, and happiness of society ; instead of opposing to the sanguinary example of the Jacobins and their horrid punishments, the example of a mild administration of our criminal laws, and showing, by the beneficence of our courts, the beauty and efficacy of a well-modelled and rational system of freedom, we had striven only to imitate their conduct by straining our criminal laws, beyond the example of all former times the blackest in the annals of England, and shocking the feelings of humanity by punishing out of all proportion to the offence ; and now, instead of opposing to their irregular, unsubstantial and inefficient schemes of finance a system of solid, equal, regular, and permanent revenue, we had adopted their very project, and grasped at a showy but miserable phantom, which would be found to elude our power and leave us in greater wretchedness than ever. In every way in which he could view the subject, it was a measure calculated not merely to delude the public for the time, and to be vexatious and oppressive as far as it went, but to be seemingly adopted for no other purpose under heaven, except to take advantage of the decay of all popular spirit for the establishment of a principle ruinous to the liberties of the country. He should conclude, therefore, with moving, “ That it is a dangerous and unconstitutional measure for the people of this country to make any loan, subscription, or benevolence to the crown, to be used for any public purpose, without the previous consent of parliament.”

*In reply to Mr. Wyndham and other speakers against the motion,*

Mr. Sheridan said, that at so late an hour, when he and the

house must both be exhausted, and after the very imperfect manner in which his former arguments were answered, he should have had the less occasion for troubling the house at any length, were it not for the extraordinary speech delivered by Mr. Wyndham. There was a time when it would be with the most sensible regret, that he could have heard any improper motives ascribed to him from that quarter. Indeed, since he had so strangely changed the line of his political conduct, and adopted a new party, he had shown himself so wonderfully dexterous in the art of enveloping his arguments, his principles, and his attachments in the most impenetrable mazes of obscurity ; he had so blended his new-born zeal for administration with expressions of the tenderest affection for his friend, Mr. Fox, that it was not till the present night that he had unequivocally spoken out. He warned the members of the opposition of the improper company with which they had associated, and ridiculed their pretensions of being the exclusive champions of the constitution, insinuating that the defence of it would be safer in other hands ; but the right hon. gentleman ought surely to recollect that they were the same company and the same champions with whom he, till very lately, acted in apparent union and in perfect confidence. In order to stigmatize his old friends in the most odious manner, he drew an insidious parallel between their motives and those which actuated Sir J. Hynde Cotton and other Jacobites, in the year 1746, who could discover no danger in the approach of the Pretender because they were so greatly interested in his success. If in truth he knew, and really believed, that there were such persons among the present members of the opposition, why did he not honestly and manfully stand up and proclaim them, instead of having recourse to skulking and in-jears ?

*Here Mr. Yorke rose, while several members were calling Mr. Sheridan to order. The Speaker demanded of Mr. Yorke whether he meant to speak to order, and no answer being returned, Mr. Sheridan proceeded.*

The hon. gentleman, he said, who, by his rising, interrupted the scope of his observations, could not be supposed to rise without some motive, and he thought him too fair and manly to retract any intention he might have had in so doing ; he was glad to find him take time for deliberation, which would, perhaps, enable him to digest his purpose better than he might have done upon the sudden impulse of the moment. Before Mr.



Wyndham sneered at the company in which the opposition acted, he should have reflected on the strange phalanx with which he was himself united. He could not well forget the triumph which he used to feel in exposing the unconstitutional principles upon which Mr. Pitt came into office, in uncasing his artifices, his subterfuges, and high prerogative principles; in representing him as an object of distrust and jealousy, and holding him up to the contempt and derision of his country. By a change of sentiment, or rather of side, as extraordinary as unprecedented, he was now found the ready advocate of every measure of administration, which certainly deserves the same character still which he formerly ascribed to it. The right hon. gentleman thought he had a great advantage in repeating his (Mr. Sheridan's) objections to stopping the supplies, in the year 1784; but on consideration he would find that this made directly against his purpose. He was very well aware that the principal control which that house could exercise over the crown was by withholding the supplies; but he was fully of opinion that this control should never be exercised but when it could be done so with effect. If it was not effectual it would be no more than a chimera. At the time alluded to, all that the house of commons could withhold was the land and malt tax, by refusing which, the crown would feel no personal distress, though it could not fail to operate most injuriously upon commerce. It would, therefore, be nugatory to stop supplies to the king, by which stoppage, in fact, the king would be no loser. He also considered that such was the state of the public mind at that time, and such the disposition of certain persons to avail themselves of it, that it was much to be apprehended the crown would be able to find supplies in the same unconstitutional manner which he was now arraigning; and then a principle, or at least a precedent be established, of infinitely more danger than any that could result from granting the supplies. From this it would appear that there was not the smallest variance between the principles which he then held, and those which he maintained now; for his advice at that time was given upon grounds of prudence and expediency. Indeed, he must consider it as some degree of hardship that he was thus called upon, a second time, to answer those arguments which he had already anticipated in his opening speech. If there was any part of his conduct through life, in which he felt himself free

from any unjust imputation, it was that of inconsistency in his political principles and attachments. How little Mr. Wyndham could boast of a similar character would shortly appear from his expedition to Norwich in the year 1782. Mr. Wyndham said, that if he opposed the voluntary subscription then proposed, upon the ground that it was illegal and unconstitutional, it was because such arguments were going at the time, and that his detestation of the American war superseded, at the time, the love of his country in such a degree, that he could not wish success to the British arms. He should have been more surprised at his thus forgetting a fact which occurred some years ago, if the failure of his memory had not been so lately exemplified in his forgetting also his former principles and attachments. But, in order to refresh his recollection, he must be under the necessity of stating to him what their former intimacy and friendship enabled him to do—that all his conversations at this time expressed the strongest conviction of the illegality of these subscriptions, and that their illegality, and unconstitutional tendency, formed the basis of those arguments he used to the meeting which he attended at Norwich. He did injustice to his own character, by saying that he employed those arguments because they were going at the time; for it was not to be supposed that a grave and able man, employed upon a serious and important expedition, would pick up his arguments by the way, like blackberries from the bushes, to serve up as a feast to politicians. He perfectly agreed with the right hon. gentleman, that there were few political rules so strictly to be adhered to, as to preclude all deviations in cases of extreme emergency; but that emergency must be found to exist at present, as well as in the year 1745, before the deviation could be properly justified. There were also several maxims, an occasional deviation from which may be attended with no very serious consequences; but there were likewise some fundamental, seminal, and vital principles, an infraction upon which, like flaws upon a diamond, always debased, and frequently destroyed their value. Of this description was any pecuniary aid given to the crown, through any other medium than that of parliament; for whatever may be its avowed purpose, it was liable to be employed in corrupting the house, and overturning the liberties of the people. He had already anticipated the use that would be made of bounties, given by corporate or other



bodies, to encourage the levy of troops which had been voted by parliament. This practice, whether legal and constitutional or not, was constantly connived at by parliament—first, because it was useful from the encouragement it offered—and secondly, because it was likely to have no bad effect; for it was no free gift, nor did the crown or its servants ever handle a shilling of it. It was also true, that the house expressed no jealousy at the *promise* of a ship to be furnished by private benevolence, and the event showed that they were right, as that promise in the end turned out not to be a *gift*. He must, however, do the noble lord to whom he alluded, the justice to own, that he gave the house a much more valuable present in the right hon. gentleman who now possessed their confidence. [Lord Lonsdale, at that time Sir James Lowther, first returned Mr. Pitt into parliament for the borough of Appleby.] He contended that ministers could have no other purpose in view, by soliciting this subscription, in what he represented to be a clandestine way, but to assert this high prerogative in the crown. It was impossible that they could expect any considerable assistance from the contributions, or if they before entertained any hopes of that nature, the late resolutions of the Surrey meeting, declaring it to be unconstitutional, gave him very little reason to believe that it would be generally productive. Upon the whole, he was of opinion that they would find more subscribers this night to the motion of the previous question, than they were likely to find towards defraying the expenses of the army. And here he could not but remark upon the conduct of the attorney-general, in contending for the legality of the proceedings, and not daring to meet it with a direct negative, which he knew would not accord with the sense of the country in general. He quoted, indeed, voluminous authorities of lawyers, living and dead: Lord Bacon, Lord Coke, Lord Hardwicke, and Lord Ashburton of the dead, summoned in support of the doctrine; and of the living, Lord Camden as well as Lord Thurlow, who seemed peculiarly the god of the gentleman's idolatry. But he argued that these illustrious men did not actually hold the opinions that were imputed to them; and a note from Lord Hardwicke was found, which expressly contradicted the extra-judicial judgment he on another occasion pronounced. The learned gentleman, finding himself unable to defend his position by any direct authority in point, was reduced

to have recourse to some *et tu quoque* observations applied to Mr. Fox, which could never be reverted to but in default of better arguments, and which had been sufficiently done away in the speech of his right hon. friend. In the whole range of his reasoning, the learned gentleman contented himself with barely mentioning the statute of 13 Charles II., but wisely abstained from any observation upon it. But as a succedaneum for this, the learned gentleman stated that Mr. Wilkes, who, in the year 1778, moved a resolution similar to that of this night, had, upon consulting legal authority, altered his opinion. How far the authority of law had influence with that gentleman, would appear from an extract which he read, of a conference between Mr. Wilkes and some other persons respecting gentlemen of the long robe. From this it was evident that Mr. Wilkes held the profession of the law in no small contempt, representing the constitution as a piece of clockwork, and the lawyers as under-workmen capable of constructing a wheel and a chain, but totally ignorant of the principles which set the machine in motion. In order to draw the attention of the learned gentleman to this, he could also add—*quod nota bene*. In opposition to the authorities on the other side, he quoted that of Mr. Hargrave, the commentator upon Lord Coke, to whom he paid high compliments, and whose opinion entirely corresponded with his own. After representing that the admission of this new doctrine, connected with the other doctrines that were avowed upon the landing of the Hessian troops, would render necessary a new bill of rights, he took notice of Mr. Powyss's observation, that the ministers could not act illegally till they had actually applied the subscription-money without the consent of parliament, and ridiculed the idea of waiting to accuse a minister of illegal proceedings till he was at the head of 50,000 men. From the opposition made to his motion he argued badly for its success, and in case of its failure, should think an act to legalise these proceedings would be highly necessary.

*The house divided on the previous question moved by the attorney-general—ayes 204 ; noes 34.*

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MARCH 31.

VOLUNTEER CORPS FOR 1782.

MR. SHERIDAN rose to move for papers, which appeared to him so much of course to grant, that it would not be possible



reasonably to object to their being laid before the house. Had he entertained any doubt on that subject, he should of course have given notice of his intention to move for them. He would however assign a reason for moving for these papers. It was because a learned gentleman, in the course of the debate on Friday night, had quoted extracts from them, and laid a considerable stress on these partial parts, in order to prove, as he said, that a subscription for raising troops had been thought of by administration in the year 1782. He therefore moved, "that an humble address be presented to his Majesty, humbly praying, he will be pleased to give directions for laying before the house, copies of all the answers received by his Majesty's secretary of state to the circular letter written by the Earl of Shelburne, containing plans for raising voluntary corps for the internal defence of the kingdom for the year 1782."

*Mr. Pitt said that the same motion was made in the year 1782, and opposed by the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Fox) who was then secretary of state, and when the hon. gentleman who made this motion was himself in an official situation in the government of this country. The house had then thought fit to refuse these very papers: for the sake of the consistency of the journals, therefore, he was desirous it should not appear that papers which had been refused when the subject was in agitation, should be granted when they became merely matter of history. He desired the journals to be read, which being done, it appeared that a motion was made for those papers on the 11th of June, on which a debate arose, and the house divided, when the motion passed in the negative 68; against it 22.*

Mr. Sheridan ridiculed, as an affected regard for consistency, in order to conceal an evident subterfuge, the chancellor of the exchequer's present declaration for consistency. The real esteem he had for that merit was evident in the manner he refused on one day, and agreed the next, to receive the petition of Mr. Palmer; and to refuse, and grant, the secretary of state's circular letter to the lord-lieutenants. The truth was, that this was a scheme of the minister to make a false impression on some part of the house, and as many as he could of the public. The attorney-general was to come forward with garbled accounts and partial extracts of returns to Lord Shelburne's letter in 1782, and from these to argue that subscriptions had been agreed upon for supporting the executive power in the year 1782. This was so unworthy an attempt, that he must take the sense of the house upon it; and he had farther to say that, if defeated now, he should bring this subject forward again in a more formal shape.

*The house divided—for the motion 18; against it 86.*

APRIL 1.

BILL FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT, &c. OF VOLUNTEER CORPS FOR  
THE GENERAL DEFENCE OF THE COUNTRY.

Mr. Francis said, that before he offered his opinion on this bill, he could not but complain of a practice which generally prevailed in that house, and which in effect took away all freedom of debate, by confining every discussion on subjects of importance to three or four individuals. That on this point he spoke with great impartiality. That a few distinguished persons, by occupying the whole time of the house with speeches of many hours, not only wore out the patience of the few who attended to them, while a majority of the members, perhaps, were taking their nourishment or their repose, but precluded all others from offering their opinion ever so shortly for want of an opportunity of being heard even for a moment. That if it was the object of eloquence to weary and deaden the attention of an unhappy audience—to exhaust all human patience—to efface, by endless repetition, an impression once made—to stupify rather than to convince—and finally, to lose the votes of friends whose constitution sunk under the intolerable burden imposed upon their faculties—then, indeed, the gentlemen he alluded to were supremely eloquent.

He then, in allusion to the intended claim, authorising subscriptions, observed, that “it had been attempted to prove principles by precedents, instead of justifying practice by principle. That every one of the instances so relied on, might be nothing better than abuses, which being but inconsiderable, perhaps, in the amount, or evidently harmless in the application, had passed without notice. But now the question comes directly before us. We are at issue on the point of right. Will you suffer it to be decided, not by its own intrinsic reason, not by the principles of the constitution, but by some special facts and instances of a modern date, in which the question of right was not debated? I do not believe that the examples produced have been fairly quoted; but if they were, what is it to us who had no concern in those transactions, and who are now contending for the truth of a constitutional principle? Instances of wrong done by others, if they were ever so numerous, are not to conclude against my right. What is it to me that such and such things were done in the administration of Mr. Fox or Mr. Pitt, or Lord Rockingham or Lord Shelburne? Were they right when they were done? If they were not, now that they are questioned is the time to condemn and put a stop to them.”

Mr. Fox in reply, said, without wishing to enter upon one of those long speeches which the hon. member had condemned, he was desirous of justifying himself from the inconsistency of conduct imputed to him from what happened in the year 1782. His own character was undoubtedly dear to him, as must be the case of every man; but he was impelled with equal force to this justification, from the character of the Marquis of Rockingham having been also involved in the charge. The memory of that illustrious person, he trusted, would still meet with many defenders in that house, and he was sure there were some (Mr. Burke was supposed to be alluded to) who could not be indifferent to any imputation thrown upon it. He then went at length into the meaning of the circular letters sent to manufacturing



Earl of Shelburne in the year 1782, and argued that they had no power with the present application.

He argued that he should not be unmindful of the hint given by Mr. Fox from a precept in a writer of very high authority with the exception of him (Captain Morris)—

“ Solid men of Boston, make no long potations ;  
Solid men of Boston, make no long orations,

*Bow ! wow ! wow ! ”*

And this injunction he could the more readily comply with, as he had in fact very little to say upon the subject. At the period alluded to Mr. Fox must know, that though he held an office supposed to be very high and very advantageous, yet he was as completely ignorant of what was in the cabinet as any man in England.

Mr. Sheridan felt himself much disappointed in that kind of defence, which he had a right to expect from Mr. Burke, of the conduct of the Marquis of Rockingham, and supposed, that the injunction against “ long orations ” was not the only moral precept in that system of ethics alluded to, which served to regulate the conduct of that right hon. gentleman. He would take the liberty to remind him of another passage in the same approved writer, in which he says—

“ He went to *Daddy Jenky*, by *Trimmer Hall* attended,

In such company, good lack ! how his *morals* must be mended.

*Bow ! wow ! wow ! ”*

He then represented that Mr. Fox had mentioned, the justification of the noble marquis to have been one of his chief motives for entering into the explanation ; whereas Mr. Burke was contented to declare his ignorance of the proceeding, and leave the memory of the Marquis of Rockingham to be defended by others. He then arraigned Mr. Burke of inconsistency, in now complaining of the place which he formerly held, and the loss of which he bewailed immediately after the administration to which he belonged was dismissed. He called to his remembrance the speech which he made upon that occasion, with a professed sensibility in all the enjoyments of which he was deprived, and, amongst others, the music of drums and fifes, which regularly afforded him a morning serenade.

*Mr. Burke having replied,*

Mr. Sheridan declared, that it was a great mistake to suppose that he had made any attack upon the morality of Mr. Burke, for if his words had been attended to, it would appear that he supposed him to possess it in such superabundance, that he might

even spare some part of it for the right hon. gentlemen that surrounded him. (Mr. Burke was sitting upon the treasury bench.) In speaking of his official situation, he did no more than repeat his own expressions; and, if he had attended to the last debate, he would have heard direct charges of inconsistency brought forward against the Marquis of Rockingham.

Mr. Sheridan thought it no light matter to sanction, for the first time, calling in military aid to the civil power, and was sorry to hear Mr. Pitt conceived any danger whatever from the interior of the country. He himself saw no great cause of fear from the attempts of France, but none at all from any co-operation which they were likely to receive in this country. If, however, the power of calling out these corps to suppress riots only, was to exist while there was a rebellion, or the appearance of it, he should not have objected to it.

*Mr. Mitford (the solicitor-general) thought this bill perfectly consistent with the true principles of the constitution. In all similar cases the sheriff might raise the posse comitatus, and in ancient times assizes of arms and commissions of array took place at the direction of the crown, though now they had fallen into disuse. The present mode of arming the gentry and yeomanry of the kingdom was therefore not new, and was, in fact, only arming property for its own protection.*

Mr. Sheridan observed, that the *posse comitatus* was not under his Majesty's command, nor governed by officers of his appointment, and this constituted a material difference. He should have thought it would have been sufficient to revive the ancient practice of commission of array and assizes of arms.

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APRIL 7.

VOLUNTEER CORPS, &c. BILL FOR THE GENERAL DEFENCE OF  
THE COUNTRY.

*The following clause was moved by Mr. Serjeant Adair, to be added as a rider to this bill. "That individuals having entered into subscriptions to raise money as an aid to government, the same should be paid into the receiver of the land tax in each county, and receipts granted by him for the respective sums received; that those sums should be paid into the receiver-general of his Majesty's exchequer, and similar receipts given by him, the whole to be applied only to such purposes as were intended by the subscribers, under the authority of and particularly specified in this bill. And if any surplus remained in the hands of the receiver-general of the exchequer, to be applied only as parliament might think proper to direct."*



MR. SHERIDAN said, that he supported the motion, although it was with reluctance that he gave his consent to any motion of the kind. He remained convinced of the illegality of the measure altogether, and of its being an unfit mode for the government of the country to resort to for supply ; but, if it was forced upon him, he would prefer, undoubtedly, that it should receive the sanction of parliament in the way that the clause of the learned sergeant proposed, than that it should stand as a matter of undisputed right. He would not go again into the question which had been discussed at so much length, but he must take notice of one argument which had been used, and which, in his mind, was weak and childish to a degree of imbecility. It was that these benevolences were not to be objected to on account of their smallness, and that the argument could not apply to them as unconstitutional or dangerous in the degree to which they could be carried. Nothing was so certain as that principles of this important kind must be sacred, and that they could admit of no degrees. If once they acknowledged the right of the crown to apply for revenue to the people, otherwise than through the channel of that house, the very first and most important bond for the maintenance of all their privileges were cancelled. The house knew well how jealous they were of the lords' interference in a money bill ; they would not suffer them to alter an iota in a bill which laid even a fine of twopence on the subject. And yet they were to suffer this measure to pass without check, which thus might grow into a most mischievous practice, and become infinitely too great for their future control.

*Mr. Wyndham followed, and referred to a charge of inconsistency brought against him, he having in 1778 called private subscriptions for government unconstitutional, and in 1794 admitted them to be the contrary.*

Mr. Sheridan, in explanation, said, that there were fundamental principles in government and constitution which could not be entrenched upon in any degree, and such as their ancestors had been careful should not be violated. *Principius obsta* was the doctrine which in just jealousy they had acted upon, but which the right hon. gentleman, in his deliberate reply to a former speech, was desirous to abolish.

*The clause was negatived without a division.*

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applied, they will afford a comfortable support for a great share of the poor of the whole kingdom. A short view of the detail of those places would readily establish this fact. In the first place, there was one single place (auditor of the exchequer) that had been enjoyed by a nobleman of considerable private fortune, from which he must have realized near half a million of money sterling. Observing here an hon. member (Mr. Rose) writing, he humorously claimed his assistance, whom he considered as so well able to make such calculations, and observed, that if a more nice account should reduce the total to two or three hundred thousand pounds, there would be no great room for triumph. He particularly reprobated the practice of those who, upon the present, as on all other occasions, particularly parliamentary reform, affected to reprobate any attempt at amendment, under the pretext that a measure, good in itself and in its principle, might be productive of mischief by being carried too far. If, as had been so pompously displayed upon various occasions, everything we held dear was at stake, was it so preposterous to call on those who gained most by the present system, to give up part for the preservation of the remainder? or what should we say of that most unparliamentary and unconstitutional measure, the general subscription? at all events that subscription would be a bad criterion by which to judge of the public spirit; for he would be bold to say that the sum total of all that should be raised by that mode, would not amount to what might be saved in the suppression of sinecures. Take the whole amount of the subscriptions throughout the kingdom, and they would not be found to exceed £200,000, notwithstanding every exertion of influence and authority which had been used. He did not believe the minister meant to repeat this experiment next year, nor yet to admit that the public spirit was evaporated; there, therefore, could be no truth in the insinuation that the French would suppose our resources exhausted by the present measure; but, on the contrary, they would see greater cause to dread us when they beheld us cutting up corruption by the root. When he heard the minister and others describing, in such high-flown terms, the zeal with which the public spirit promoted the present subscription, he should have been considered as paying some gentlemen a bad compliment, if he were to estimate by their fortunes the amount of their subscriptions; especially when he saw that some, who



were so liberal in their praises and panegyric, had annexed to their names the paltry sum of £50. If, as was asserted, it was necessary for our existence to conquer the French, we must do it by beating them at their own weapons; and, like them, it would be necessary to make considerable sacrifices. Now, a noble lord (Mornington) had, upon a former debate, stated that property to the amount of £400 a-year was effective only to the amount of £120, and he wished ministers and gentlemen holding places to adopt this proposition, which, at four years' purchase, which he should be glad if it were the longest duration of the contest, would produce no inconsiderable income. For instance, if a noble cousin of the minister's (the Marquis of Buckingham) out of his place as teller of the exchequer, were to give £8,000 a-year, that in four years would make a sum of £32,000. Another cousin too (Lord Grenville) might apply £4000, the amount of his place of ranger of the park, which he affected not to receive, but which, notwithstanding, he would assert was in fact no saving at all to the public. The other secretary of state, out of his multiplied places of treasurer of the navy, president of the board of control, &c. might devote the profits of one at least of those places to the same patriotic purpose. To these might be added, with, perhaps, singular propriety, a part of the profits of the gentleman (Mr. Rose) who was so expert at calculation; and who, upon this subject, possessed an experience and a source of knowledge not inferior to any of them. Here Mr. Sheridan stated that he had just had put into his hand a list of the places enjoyed by Mr. Rose, but which, as being too long, he should decline to state. However, upon a cry of "Read! Read!" he proceeded to enumerate as follows: clerk of the parliament; master of the pleas office; surveyor of the green wax; secretary to the treasury, a place, no doubt, well known to many gentlemen of that house. Here hesitating, and the cry of "Read!" being repeated, he wished to know whether the gentlemen were not sufficiently satisfied, after having heard four enumerated; in fact, there were two more on the paper, but being written with a pencil, he could not make them out. Returning to the subject before them, he observed that the minister was much in the habit of boasting of the flourishing state of our commerce during this war; but he denied that this boast had any real foundation, if we attended to the difference between the present and late war. Then we were at war

with four nations, whose maritime exertions were individually powerful: now we had to contend but with one, whose marine force was at least crippled, if not annihilated. The state likewise of our manufactures was a boast equally unfounded; for the observations of the gentleman (Mr. Coke) who seconded the motion, was not, as asserted, confined to Norwich, but extended to the whole kingdom, throughout which the manufacturer was starving, and could be rendered serviceable only by being made a soldier of again. That house had been accustomed, every year, to hear the minister make a display of the reduction of the national debt. Now, he would ask, when anything substantial in that way was to take place? the answer was obvious; it was a dream which never could be realized. By the promises held out, we were to arrive at a peace establishment; that is, our income was to equal our expenditure, beside the annual million towards the reduction of the debt, and the £200,000 surplus. That period, notwithstanding these splendid promises, had never yet arrived; and he would affirm, in the most positive terms, never by the event of this war, can now be expected; because, if peace were happily established to-morrow, our establishments, whether military, naval, or civil, would be considerably higher than ever. And would the minister say that our resources would increase in any proportion? He was sure he could not. Another principle there was which called for their serious attention. The minister had formerly come forward with a pompous display of a plan by which, on any future war, it would be necessary to fund any debt to be contracted in such a manner that the whole of it must be paid within a certain period. This principle he certainly adhered to, upon the first occasion that offered after its adoption. But has he persevered in it upon the present occasion? No such thing! It was abandoned and gone for ever, and with it vanished away the most distant prospect of a reduction of the national debt. On the contrary, they had nothing to look to in the future, but, as in the past, the eternal plea of necessity to justify or excuse the repetition of new loans. An hon. member (Mr. Drake), after a panegyric on the merits of inconsistency, which seemed to be now the only feature and characteristic of superior talents, claimed the right hereafter, notwithstanding his opposition to the present motion, to vote for the entire abolition of all sinecure places; he did not mean to dispute that right with him now, more than he



did the right which he claimed on a former occasion, to be as animated as he pleased; he should only content himself with declaring his satisfaction of being of the number of those dull, phlegmatic description of men, who boast of that uniformity of principle and practice which, he trusted, would ever distinguish those with whom he had the honour and happiness to act. To those who were alarmed with the idea of the novelty of the present motion, he had to remind them that in February, 1783, the present chancellor of the exchequer moved, in conformity to his Majesty's speech, for leave to bring in a bill which was, in effect, but a continuance of that which reflected so much honour on a right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke). Of precisely the same nature was the present motion, which was not, as asserted by that gentleman, an attack upon places held for life, but, in the words of the motion itself, referring to certain places; what those should be which would be the object of the bill, the committee alone could decide. Thus the whole of that part of the argument of the right hon. gentleman upon that topic, fell to the ground. For these reasons it was, he declared his decided approbation and support to the motion before the house.

*Mr. Rose replied to Mr. Sheridan, and in the course of his speech observed, "After all that had been said upon the question, what was the whole drift of the argument? It was an appeal to popular prejudices. Tax placemen and pensioners is a re-echoing of the popular cry; but he confessed he did not perceive why they should be more taxed than the hon. gentleman, as manager of his theatre, or than as a man who travelled the country with his puppet-show at his back.*

Mr. Sheridan, in explanation, said that his arguments had been mis-stated by Mr. Rose, for they went merely to induce the placemen to support the motion. He took notice of his having been once before the subject of the same joke (respecting his property in the theatre) in the same terse, neat, and classical terms by Mr. Rose. Another gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had, on a former occasion, taken the same liberty; he trusted it would be the last time that there should be such unparliamentary allusion to the situation, circumstances, profession, or occupation of any gentleman in that house.

*The house divided—for the motion 50; against it 117.*

APRIL 11.

## BILL TO ENABLE SUBJECTS OF FRANCE TO ENLIST AS SOLDIERS.

*Mr. Pitt moved the order of the day on the bill to enable his Majesty to employ the subjects of France on the continent of Europe, in the French West India islands, at Guernsey and Jersey, and other places ; which being read, he moved, " That the bill be now read a second time."*

MR. SHERIDAN declared, he never had heard so extraordinary a bill defended in so extraordinary a manner ; it was even treated with a kind of civility, as if it had a claim to respect. The hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) seemed surprised at the objections of his hon. friend (Mr. Baker), and indeed that any objections at all should be made against it ; just as if it was a matter of course, and perfectly conformable to law, to take into the service of this country an immense body of Roman Catholics, foreigners, and men who had taken no test whatever. This was a decided declaration of change of system. An hon. gentleman (Mr. Jenkinson) had partly communicated this new plan of the operations of the campaign, which was to get into the interior of France. That plan should have been adopted last year ; instead of which a narrow and miserable system had been pursued, that of attacking little, paltry, insignificant places. What new circumstance, he desired to ask, had occurred this year to make such a plan necessary ? Was it the circumstance of our having broken our faith with the people of Toulon ? Was it the circumstance of our having deceived the unfortunate royalists of La Vendée ? After every means of making an impression in France seemed to have vanished, a new light broke in upon us, and we were to adopt a measure which there was not a single reason at present to justify, although there might have been last year. His objection to the measure was a fundamental one, and went to the whole bill at once, as unnecessary and unconstitutional. The motive assigned by an hon. general for his approbation of the bill, was one of the reasons why he objected to it ; as he conceived nothing more cruel, or more devoid of feeling and humanity, than driving unfortunate persons into the field with a certainty of destruction ; either of falling in battle, or the more dreadful alternative of being taken prisoners and hanged. If these Frenchmen in our armies should be so treated, on being taken in battle, were we to revenge their fate and retaliate on the French prisoners in our possession ? [" Yes," exclaimed Mr. Burke.] Good Heaven ! replied Mr.



Sheridan, consider that the lives of millions may depend upon that single word—that you will introduce a system of human sacrifice all over Europe by such a measure—that you send these poor unfortunate beings into the field with halters around their necks as part of their accoutrements. Nothing, he was persuaded, but the warmth which the hon. gentleman felt on ministerial questions could have led him into an expression which might be the herald of cool massacre to many of our own troops. He hoped that the house would never place the armies of Great Britain in so deplorable a situation—that it would turn with horror from a system of barbarous and execrable warfare hitherto unknown in the history of civilized Europe. This was the first time in which it had been acknowledged, from ministerial authority, that France had “subjects;” and we might be assured that the present government of that country would treat those subjects as rebels, whenever they found them fighting in the pay of Great Britain. The paltry saving which it was said would accrue from the officers of those corps not having half-pay after the war, should the object of it be unsuccessful, he could consider as no other than a delusion. The same had been said a few years since of the royalist corps in America; but at the conclusion of the war these officers, driven from their homes, remained a heavy incumbrance on the gratitude of this country. Did any man pay his country so bad a compliment, as to suppose that the feelings and spirit of a British parliament would consent to send those unfortunate gentlemen into the field, under such cruel circumstances as he had described, and, after they had bled in our service, turn them adrift to linger out their lives in melancholy meditations upon British benevolence? In a constitutional point of view, he held the bill to be a most dangerous one. Martial law, to which the men were to be subjected, was to be left entirely to his Majesty without any limitation whatever. It might be made a law that, in case of any disobedience to *any order*, they should be punished with death; and it was not impossible that the king might be persuaded by his advisers to employ that army in overthrowing the free constitution of this country. It was, besides, natural to conclude that a body of men, smarting under the lash, and detesting even the name of liberty, might be inclined to do anything that might bring about that despotism which was so dear to them; on that ground, therefore, placing them under the power of the

crown left little security for the liberties of Englishmen. Mr. Sheridan said, he did not expect to find the observations of his hon. friend (Mr. Baker), on the subject of troops being brought into this country for exercise, treated in so jocular a manner. He had no objections to the right hon. gentleman growing more and more facetious every day, but he wished him to confine his wit to suitable occasions. The right hon. gentleman's idea of exercise could mean nothing else than military array. It had been said, that there could be no danger from these troops, because they were not to come beyond a certain distance from the coast; such an assertion was treating them like schoolboys; for in what other light did that part of the bill consider the foreign troops who were not to go out beyond their *bounds*? and if they did, our messengers were to go to them, with the bill in their hands, and say, "You are a naughty army; do not attempt to stir an inch beyond the limits assigned you; get back again to your proper ground." Such was to be the language which a bit of paper (a scare-crow carried in the hands of our messengers or stuck on a finger-post) was to use to an army of 40 or 50,000 men embodied in Kent or Sussex, and under the absolute command of his Majesty. To many it might seem of no trifling consequence to have such a body of French Roman Catholics, without test or regular allegiance, at the disposal of the regular government; to him their opinions, in respect to religion, were, he owned, of no very great importance. Let it be recollected, however, that if, in this age of liberality and religious tolerance, it was not deemed unsafe to entertain in the kingdom an army of possibly 30,000 Roman Catholic foreigners; what an insult did we offer to the Roman Catholics of England in continuing those oppressive and degrading restrictions, notwithstanding which they eminently distinguished their loyalty and manifested the most dutiful spirit of allegiance! If this bill should pass, he should think it his duty to bring, without loss of time, the situation of that meritorious class of subjects, the English Roman Catholics, as well as all the other dissenters under the review of parliament, of which he was desirous that what he then said should be considered a sufficient notice; and the object of his motion would be, that all tests on account of religious opinions should be abolished. He knew that, in making propositions of that kind, it was in general thought necessary to have some previous consultation with his Majesty's



ministers, and some understanding with the people themselves. However, he should proceed without consulting either of them, relying on the propriety and manifest justice of the measure. Mr. Sheridan concluded with saying, that he should oppose the second reading; in which, if he was successful, he should propose some emendatory clauses in the committee.

*The house divided—for the motion 105; against it 30.*

APRIL 14.

ROYALTY THEATRE.

*Mr. Mainwaring moved, "That leave be given to bring in a bill to enable his Majesty to license, as a play-house during the summer season, the theatre called the Royalty Theatre."*

MR. SHERIDAN observed, that this application was only a renewal of what had been made a few years ago, which the house then, on full consideration, thought proper to reject. A number of persons on that occasion had thought proper, without any direct authority, to open a theatre near Wellclose-square, affecting to do so under the power of Lord Cornwallis, a constable of the Tower, when in fact they neither had, nor could have, any such authority. They were admonished upon the subject, and told they could not proceed under the authority of any law. The proprietors of the winter theatres, knowing that if this was suffered their property might be materially injured by similar conduct in other places, took measures which the law gave to stop this proceeding; they were resisted by the gentlemen of this theatre until the expense of the prosecution amounted to £2,800. Now he wished to submit to the house, whether any reason was given for allowing this attack on the property of the winter theatres to be renewed. He confessed he saw none that could bear upon the subject fairly, unless the house were prepared to say that the monopoly of the patents should exist no longer, and that the theatres, like any other property where there was no patent to protect it, should be left to the rivalry of individuals. Perhaps some gentlemen might be disposed to treat with levity a subject of this nature as matter of mere amusement, but it might not be amiss to observe by the way, that £100,000 were given for the patent of one of the winter theatres, and that £100,000 more had been laid out in fitting it up for the entertainment of the public, and then perhaps the question of property might de-

serve a little more serious consideration. He then gave a short account of the proceedings of the gentlemen concerned in the establishment of the Royalty Theatre, and the course they took in resisting the known law. The claim of the present petitioners was rested on rather a curious foundation, because they had, contrary to express laws, rebuilt a theatre which was shut up by the judgment of a court of law, and now came to parliament for a bill to legalise their act. It would be somewhat extraordinary if there was a law which said that there should be but two canals in the kingdom, and certain persons should, in the face of this law, cut a third, and then come to parliament for an act to make their conduct legal. He thought that it would be a very great hardship, after the proprietors of the theatres royal had gone to an enormous and incredible expense under the sanction of law, and reliance on particular acts of parliament, if any persons might innovate upon that property.

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APRIL 16.

ROMAN CATHOLICS AND DISSENTERS.

MR. SHERIDAN gave notice that he should, on the first open day after the holidays, move for leave to bring in a bill to put the Roman Catholics and dissenters of this country, on a footing, at least, as to tests, with the foreigners about to be employed in the service of this country in the present war; and he really wished, he said, that ministers would take this into their most serious consideration, and hoped there would not be a dissenting voice to that proposition.

BILL TO ENABLE SUBJECTS OF FRANCE TO ENLIST AS  
SOLDIERS.

Mr. Sheridan proposed an amendment, that instead of the bill being in force during the present war, it should continue only for one year. He observed that his Majesty had no power to continue in his service his own subjects longer than one year, and that this was always under the provision of the mutiny bill. He saw no reason whatever—on the contrary, he saw much danger—that the power of the crown should be more extensive with regard to the employment of foreigners in the British service. The object of the war was now defined by ministers, to be that of the destruction of the present form of government in France, and the



establishment of order, morality, and religion in that country. It might, perhaps, be discovered that we should not be able to effect that without employing 500,000 men, and by this bill the number was indefinite. He would then ask, whether any vote of credit that house ever gave to the crown was so extensive as this? He would ask gentlemen what answer they had to give to their constituents, if they should demand to know how the power of the purse of this country stood? Were they not bound to confess that the whole of it was entirely given up to the discretion of the executive power? and although the bill was silent as to the half-pay of all those who should act under this bill, yet it might turn out in the event, that notwithstanding they had no claim upon this country according to the letter of the act, yet, like the American loyalists, they might have an irresistible claim on our magnanimity, generosity, and even our justice. Besides, after we had succeeded (which, by the way, might be many years hence) in the glorious cause of establishing a government in France, the contest might be changed into a squabble for indemnification, and an attempt to partition France, in which persons acting under this bill could not possibly assist. He urged many other arguments in favour of his amendment; the great object of which was to keep in the hands of that house, what they always ought to have for the benefit of the people, the power of the public purse.

*The solicitor-general said, that the reason of making the mutiny bill annual appeared to be, because it was thought unfit to trust the articles of war made, or that might be made by his Majesty, for the government of troops within the kingdom, longer than a year; but this did not apply to troops that were to be employed abroad.*

Mr. Sheridan said, the mutiny bill for the king's troops in India was annual. It was only for the company's troops that it was permanent. The volunteer corps proposed to be raised for the internal defence of the country, were as much under the annual mutiny bill as the regular troops; and if it should be suffered to expire, they might be very respectable-looking gentlemen in red coats, but they would no longer be soldiers.

*The house divided on the amendment—ayes 29; noes 128.*

Mr. Sheridan proposed a clause to limit the number of persons enlisted under the act, which shall on any pretence be within the kingdom at any one time to 5,000.

*This was adopted.*

APRIL 17.

BILL TO ENABLE SUBJECTS OF FRANCE TO ENLIST AS  
SOLDIERS.

*This was a third time read, and the question put "That the bill do pass." A debate ensued, in which Mr. Burke took a very considerable share.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that there was one circumstance and one assertion in which he believed he should be joined by the majority of the house, which was, that the disqualifying sentence passed by the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) upon himself, was altogether unfounded; for he never heard the hon. gentleman display more talents, more variety, or more eloquence, than on the present occasion; and he showed by no means any appearance of declining faculties or powers in the wane, except when the right hon. gentleman found it convenient, for the sake of argument, to lose his memory. But, though confessing his splendid talents, he could not grant to the right hon. gentleman one quality which he assumed to himself, that of being a plain matter-of-fact man; for he certainly had never heard a more varied fancy or splendid imagination displayed, or greater arts exercised to inflame the mind or mislead the reason. Humanity had been very much dwelt upon by the right hon. gentleman, and, was he not convinced to the contrary, he should consider him as displaying an instance of the total want of it, from the levity with which he spoke at all times, when any opportunity occurred, of the murders, massacres, and guillotines of a neighbouring country. He could not this night say it was a smile of indignation, for through the whole of his speech he was full of his jokes upon those serious and calamitous subjects. But, as to the enormities committed by the people of France, and which he by no means was desirous to palliate, he only wished to inquire how far these are to be attributed to the people themselves, and how far to the ancient form of their government. The right hon. gentleman has said, that it was a strong presumption against any government when the generality of mankind rise in arms against them; this position may be true, but it is also a strong presumption against any form of government that chances to be subverted by any sudden revolution, when the people of that government are found, as soon as their bands are broken, committing every species of violence and enormity, that the government itself was a bad one; for whatever



vice, whatever enormities are committed by this people, they could not have been acquired from the sudden change of government, but have attained them under that government where their principles must have been formed. If they were prone to deprive others of their property, it was because they were accustomed to see the life of man made light of, and the human form disregarded. The right hon. gentleman talks of the security under the ancient government of France, when every man enjoyed himself in peace under his own vine and beneath his own fig-tree; surely the hon. gentleman cannot be serious in the assertion; he must have lost all remembrance of what the ancient government of France was. He is also lavish in his praises of their courts of justice, which were notorious for their misconduct and perversion of right. Their clergy, at least the higher orders of them, were professed atheists and deists; and there was not a single man in the whole country, who affected any knowledge of the world, or pretended to common sense, that would not consider the opinion of the right hon. gentleman with regard to their religion, an insult to their understanding rather than a compliment to their virtue; hence sprung those atheistical principles—this want of every virtue of which we complain. The right hon. gentleman has said, that they were wild beasts before we attacked them, and that it was on account of their being so that it was found expedient and necessary so to do. He wished to know if, previous to the attack of the two most considerable of the combined powers, Prussia and Austria, they were the wild beasts the right hon. gentleman had described? If so, why did not we then attack them? Why rather boast of our partiality towards them, and express a wish to conciliate their friendship and court their alliance—[here a cry of “No! No!”]—at least it must be granted that we endeavoured to conciliate them so far as to preserve peace with them, and were on every occasion boastful of our observance of neutrality.

The right hon. gentleman also expressed a wish for a powerful army, to break through the crust of the iron frontier of that country, and to make the French emigrants the point of that wedge; to be sure, it was putting those gentlemen in the most dangerous post; but he had no doubt that their high sense of honour would make them anxious to fill it. But are we certain of success from this measure, supposing we could even raise an army of two or three hundred thousand men? For, notwith-

standing the idea of the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas), that if he could once muster such an army it would maintain itself, he believed it would not be found so easy a matter to effect it; for probably it would but induce the people to rise in large bodies, and form a more considerable mass to oppose this formidable army; and it is a well-known fact, that in La Vendée there was, at one period, 200,000 men in actual rebellion; but even that number, formidable as it was, the convention found means to suppress. He wished to call to the right hon. gentleman's recollection—though he was convinced his memory was wholly unimpaired, except when forgetfulness might be attended with convenience—that in the case of America, this idea was held forth to the public, that the majority of the people there were really averse to the ruling power, and that they wanted nothing but encouragement to induce them to declare themselves; but this proved a vain and delusive hope, and such would be the event of the present measure held out to the public. The little monosyllable (*yes*) which the right hon. gentleman affected to treat with so much levity, and upon which he unnecessarily displayed so much wit and humour, went to convey an approbation of a system of retaliation which was not a proper subject of mirth. But, after all the right hon. member has been pleased to advance on the subject, it is impossible to say whether that system is to be adopted; and it is but right, not for the information of an individual merely, but for those persons to be employed under this bill, that it should be known. A certain noble lord (Mulgrave), high in the service of his Majesty, and, as he supposed, enjoying the confidence of his Majesty's ministers, had declared that, in his opinion, the system of retaliation was to be adopted; and he supposed he did not say this without the approbation of those with whom he acted; but, at the same time, he wished for an explicit declaration upon the subject. The savage nature of the French, their unexampled ferocity, had been expatiated upon much at large; but, he believed, with regard to their treatment of their prisoners, they acted on humane and honourable principles; he wished to know from the noble lord if the fact was so or not. (*His lordship nodded assent.*) The right hon. gentleman had quoted a variety of precedents concerning the doctrine of retaliation as to its practice; and in each of these precedents, excepting with regard to America, he had



completely failed. The first is the conduct of the English, as respected the Irish regiments in the French service, in the year 1745—a space of nearly sixty years, when they took some of them prisoners; but it was not very probable that many of those who left Ireland in 1681 returned to invade England in 1745; but even in this he makes an exception with respect to some who were engaged in a plan to subvert the government of this country, and who were punished, which will be exactly the situation of the persons to be employed under the present bill. The next precedent was the conduct of the French to Lord Ligonier, when taken prisoner, who was one of the French refugees banished from France by the revocation of the edict of Nantz (which was in itself one of the most cruel and barbarous actions that ever disgraced history) in the year 1692, and he was taken prisoner in the year 1747, a period of fifty-five years; so that the probability is, that it was the father of his lordship who was a refugee, or at least that his lordship must have been but a child in arms at the time. But what was the object of this war,—to subvert the existing government of France, or to destroy the ruling powers there; and, therefore, it is possible that such of the subjects of France as are taken in arms for this purpose, will be treated as rebels. That frantic, furious, and murderous disposition which the French have discovered, was not shown, says the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) by Louis XIV., when all Europe united against him; nor by the Venetians when the league of Cambray was formed; for this plain and obvious reason—there was no intention to destroy Louis XIV. or his government, or to subvert the established form of government of Venice; but, in the present case, our avowed object is the subversion of the existing power of France and those who bear rule there. In the early part of his speech the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) treated with much levity and ridicule the humanity professed by my right hon. friend towards the emigrants. We afford compassion,—we sympathise with them,—but will not do anything to restore them. The application of the principle of humanity to them is this—not to hold out to them a promise of protection which we may not afterwards be able to afford them. He called to the mind of the right hon. gentleman the protection promised to the people of La Vendée, but which was never yielded. He desired him to recollect the promised protec-

tion of the Toulonese, whom we afterwards proved unequal to protect. He wished also, if necessary, to refreshen the memory of the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) on the subject of holding out protection to the American loyalists; a principle against which the right hon. gentleman himself wrote and spoke with infinite ability, and predicted what would be the consequence of such proffered protection; anticipations which were afterwards completely verified. Another right hon. member (Mr. Dundas) had said, that the question he found most difficult to answer on this subject was, why the measure was not adopted before? The reason was, that the object of the war was not what it now is, the subversion of the French government. Or, perhaps, the right hon. gentleman might think it a more convenient season when the insurgents in La Vendée are suppressed, and that the French will have a stronger reliance on, and hope of security from our promised protection, in consequence of having witnessed our faith to the Toulonese. That right hon. gentleman, speaking of the mildness of our laws, asks which is the greater crime, stealing a cheese out of a window, which an unfortunate man may do, either from wretched propensity, or from the pressure of necessity? or that of endeavouring to excite sedition and infuse discontent among his Majesty's subjects? In this case the right hon. gentleman has done what he is often much disposed to do; he assumes as a ground what is not fact, and reasons upon it afterwards. The persons to whom he alludes, so far from being guilty, or convicted of the crimes which he imputes to them, have not even been charged with any such offence. With regard to the present bill, he contended that if it was passed in the form in which it then was, that the house of commons would no longer have existence as a house of commons, because they would abandon those two great principles upon which their authority depends,—the power of a check upon the crown, by having an annual opportunity of disbanding the army; and the guardianship of the public purse; that then they might have reason to console themselves when they returned to their constituents, and stated, that they had resigned those great privileges of which they had been appointed the guardians. He showed that under the unlimited authority, both as to the expense that may be incurred, and the number of troops which may be employed, the king, if he chose, might not call a parliament in the next year;



but this, he was sure, would be thought an extreme case, when gentlemen called to mind the virtues, integrity, and regard for the constitution, which his Majesty's present advisers were known to possess. He earnestly besought the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) to consent to limit the duration of the bill to one year, as it could by no means impede the success of his object.

*The bill passed without a division.*

APRIL 29.

PRUSSIAN SUBSIDY.

*On the 28th of April the following message from the king was delivered to the house—"His Majesty has ordered copies of a treaty which has been signed at the Hague by the plenipotentiaries of his Majesty and the states-general of the United Provinces on the one part, and by the plenipotentiary of the King of Prussia on the other part; and likewise of a convention agreed upon between the respective plenipotentiaries of his Majesty and the states-general to be laid before the house: and his Majesty, relying on the zealous and affectionate support of his faithful commons, in the vigorous prosecution of the war in which he was engaged, recommends it to this house to consider of making provision towards enabling his Majesty to fulfil the engagements which his Majesty has entered into, as well as to defray any extraordinary expenses which may be incurred for the service of the present year, and to take such measures as the exigency of affairs may require."*

*On the 29th Mr. Curwen moved, "That the house should be called over to consider this subject this day fortnight."*

MR. SHERIDAN said, it was not his intention to trouble the house much at length on the present subject. If it was possible that the gentlemen on the other side would suffer the question to be put, without explaining any cause of their dissent, or upon what grounds they so far disapproved of the present motion, as to think a call of the house unnecessary, he did suppose that it was not their intention to oppose it, but that they meant to conform to the old proverb, "silence gives consent;" but, if that was not the case, he trusted that they would indulge the house, by stating the reasons upon which they objected to the motion.

*Mr. Whitbread addressed the house with great warmth, and observed, it was impossible to withstand the torrent on the other side of the house, and that Mr. Pitt had the command of it.*

Mr. Sheridan rose—"Spoke! spoke!" was repeated from several parts of the house.] He observed, that what he had already said could hardly be called a speech, it was only a hint at the candour of the minister; besides, gentlemen might as well

tolerate a few observations upon that, as they were determined to remain silent on the other side. As to the allusion of his hon. friend to the influence of the minister in that house, it was certainly very unparliamentary; he was glad he explained it, for it was not true—we all knew the minister had no influence whatever on the majority of the house, except such as he honourably derived from his eloquence and fair argument. But his powers were not confined to the utterance of words merely, he had a dumb as well as oral eloquence, of which he had given a capital specimen to-night, for he had convinced them all at once by his silence; it was but just putting it in motion, and instantly all his friends became affected by the charm, and they all nodded dumb dissent to the motion like himself. This certainly carries with it some ground of suspicion; and what has fallen unintentionally from my hon. friend, is not wholly unfounded. (Here a cry of “order.”) But was the minister quite sure that some might not misunderstand him? Perhaps they might understand his conduct, according to the proverb, “silence gives consent,” and under that idea vote for the motion. These dumb votes might bring him into a dilemma, especially as he had yesterday desired that this motion should not be made, but should be deferred to this day. It was known how long and how well the right hon. gentleman could declaim—he begged pardon, argue—on any topic, without the least time to consider of his subject; but it was odd he should have required so much time to prepare himself for holding his tongue.

*Sir George Young said, that when he called “order” he did not allude to anything that the hon. member had said, but in consequence of a noise in the gallery.*

Mr. Sheridan begged the hon. baronet to remember, that he could not see or hear any person in the gallery; that it was empty, and no strangers could be there; and he was very happy that none of his constituents were present to observe the disgraceful conduct of the house that night, and that it was not, therefore, likely to be published to the world; as for his part, he should make it his study to prevent the shameful secret from transpiring, as far as was in his power. By the treaty (he observed) the object of the war was entirely changed: the King of Prussia, who, as had been stated by an hon. member, was engaged in a purely defensive war, no longer remained a principal in the war; he now merely hired some troops, and furnished



others, in conformity with the terms of subsisting treaties between him and this country and Holland. We now avow ourselves engaged for the re-establishment of the monarchy of France; and the whole object being changed, he felt himself at liberty to withdraw his promised support, and had no difficulty in saying that he should refuse it, except in the case of invasion, or such circumstance as called upon every man to stand forward in the defence of his country. He repeated what he said at a former period, that any minister ought to be impeached, and lose his head, who spilled the blood of his countrymen, or expended the treasure of the nation, to restore the ancient despotism of France. He observed, that we were likely to have a new tie upon us for continuing on the war, as he understood, from pretty good authority, that there was at this time a large loan negotiating for the emperor, in this country. With regard to the present treaty, he reverted to the attention the ministers of Holland paid their countrymen; they absolutely refused to pledge them for more than a single year; whilst our ministers, on the other hand, have consented, on the part of England, to the payment of £1,800,000 annually during the war, £400,000 of which we were to get from the Dutch as well as we could. They have not felt it incumbent on them to pay any respect to the commons of Great Britain, or to the wishes of their country; but have wantonly pledged us to pay a large sum of money, the whole of which will probably fall on us after the expiration of the first year. It was neither policy nor wisdom in the right hon. gentleman, to treat the commons with so much inattention, and by that means to render them insignificant in the eyes of the people, especially as he opposed every proposition made for a reform in the representation, and denied its necessity. The whole of his conduct, during the present session, had gone to render the representation contemptible, and on no occasion more than the present. He warned him of the bad consequence and impolicy of refusing discussion and explanation, when called for, both by the importance, the magnitude, and consequences of any subject. He was afraid the public would be incensed at these proceedings. He was afraid that these attempts of the minister, to set aside all the deliberation of the house of commons, and to prevent them by these hasty steps from meeting, as they ought to do, in the character of representatives of the people, would

induce the people to meet themselves, to discuss these things and determine on them ; and he thought that they had a right so to do.

*The house divided—ayes 19; noes 98.*

Mr. Sheridan said, after what had passed on this subject, no person could rationally entertain any sanguine hopes that any opposition to this measure would be attended with proper effect; perhaps the granting of a few millions of money of the people of this country, did not appear to that house to be of importance enough to make it worth their while to pay any attention to it. He should have contented himself with giving to this resolution, in its present form, his simple negative, if it had not been for a very alarming rumour of an unfortunate event abroad, of which he feared ministers had intelligence, and which he feared was too true ; he meant the total defeat of General Clairfayt, together with the entire loss of his whole camp, baggage, and stores, and of the taking of Courtray. Every person must feel the most sincere regret at such intelligence, and the general impression of that circumstance must add to the desire the house had to provide for the safety of this country, and for strengthening the power of the hands of government. But he saw the subject now under consideration of the house in so particular a point of view, from the peculiar situation of the country, that this unfortunate intelligence increased his objection to the measure. It would be wiser in us to claim of the King of Prussia his fulfilment of the treaty of 1788, and employ the residue of the money, now about to be voted, to some other purpose ; for, considering the great difficulties we were now under, he had no objection to the two millions and a half, but he objected to this application of the sum ; and he must say, it appeared to him, of all the topics which the chancellor of the exchequer had ever chosen for panegyric, none was more unsuitable than the good terms of this bargain with the King of Prussia ; for it struck him to be the most prodigally extravagant agreement he ever heard of. Had we called on the King of Prussia, and he fulfilled the treaty of 1788, we should have had 30,000 Prussian troops for a whole year for £600,000, of which we were to defray £400,000, and the Dutch £200,000. The question of economy, therefore, the minister could not adduce to his own advantage, in discussing this bargain with the King of Prussia.



The minister had, on a former day, compared this with other subsidiary treaties, and with the expense of Hessian and other troops; he should have compared it with our last treaty with the King of Sardinia, and then we should see the point of economy a little more distinctly. He wanted to know in what light to consider the present situation of the King of Prussia. Was he merely a hirer of his troops (as many other monarchs were on other occasions) in this war? or was he a party for himself, as principal in this cause? By the treaty between us and the King of Sardinia, there were to be employed in the common cause, for one year, fifty thousand men, for which we were to pay £200,000; and now we were to have of the King of Prussia only thirty thousand men, for one year, for £1,600,000. The house would see by this the bargain with regard to the question of economy. Another thing was to be considered; he wished to ask whether the King of Prussia had the sixty-two thousand men now completely equipped; if he had not, and we were to wait until he had them, then his stipulation was a gross imposition upon us, and we might advance our money for nothing. If, on the other hand, he had them ready, it was a gross imposition to call for our assistance, by way of subsidy, for that which he could produce without it; for it was calling on us, in fact, to assist him to complete what was complete already. In the view he had taken of this subject, the house would see we might avoid the great expense of this treaty, by calling on the King of Prussia to furnish us with thirty thousand men for one year, according to the treaty of 1788, and for which we were bound to pay him no more than £400,000, and then we might apply the remaining sum of money, which was little less than £1,600,000 in another and a better way; for he must say fairly and openly at once, we could not prudently, after what we had witnessed, place any confidence whatever in the promises or engagements of the King of Prussia; he meant to say nothing of that prince personally; in what he said, he alluded only to the court of Berlin;—he did not mean to dwell on the conduct of that court to Poland; it was too notorious to require a comment; but he must call on the house to recollect that, at this moment, only ten short months had passed since other powers had entered into a convention with us, not to lay down arms until every place taken by the French had been given up. This was known by

the King of Prussia, and yet he lays down his arms in 1794, in open violation of all faith and the true spirit of treaty. Was there, therefore, any reason to put any faith in the pledge of such a court? For his part, he saw not the least prudence in putting the smallest faith in such pledge, or advancing a single British guinea on the confidence of it.

With regard to the treaty itself, he could see in it nothing to give more confidence than ought to have been given to the other engagements. He saw very crafty provisions in it for the King of Prussia. Mr. Pitt said, the army of the King of Prussia was to act in concert with others for the common cause; but had not the King of Prussia the command of them all, and might he not, from that very power, defeat the very end which we might have in view by this treaty? Here Mr. Sheridan read some of the articles of the treaty, to show the great care which the king had taken of our interest; and then he asked what was the object of the King of Prussia in the manner he was acting? As he had the command of these sixty-two thousand men, he had too much reason to apprehend that the King of Prussia would not act in any co-operation with Austria. He should be glad to know what power we had over the destination of these troops. If there should be any disagreement of opinion among the combined powers, how was that difference to be settled? He saw no provision made, that the majority should decide it; all the discretion, as to the Prussian troops, was left to the King of Prussia alone. Suppose we were to take any towns, Dunkirk for instance, and we wanted troops to garrison it; could we compel the King of Prussia to detach a part of his troops for that purpose? He saw no provision whatever of that nature; everything was left to the discretion of the King of Prussia. Another thing to be considered was, that we were to pay the King of Prussia £600,000 before he moves his army; though our minister trusted him so implicitly, he took care, for his part, not to trust anybody. Now, after £600,000 was paid to the King of Prussia, what security had we that he would move one man of them? After receiving the money, he might see some disturbance in his own dominions or in the neighbourhood—in Poland, perhaps, which might be more to his interest to attend to, than attending to any subsidiary affairs for us. Thinking this bargain was extravagant—that no faith could be



placed in the engagements of the court of Berlin—knowing we had a right to call on the King of Prussia, if disposed to trust him at all, to fulfil the engagement of the treaty of 1788, by which we might have thirty thousand Prussian troops for a year, for £400,000, and believing the remainder of this vote could be better applied, he should move that all that part of the resolution which related to fulfilling the engagement with the King of Prussia be left out, so that the resolution would be confined merely to a vote of credit for two millions and a half.

*The house divided—for the amendment 32; against it 82.*

MAY 5.

ABERDEEN BILL.



MR. SHERIDAN rose and stated that, among the orders of the day, one stood for taking into consideration the report of the Aberdeen bill; and also notice of a motion for discharging the order for the petitioners against that bill being heard by counsel. The house very well knew that this bill was opposed by 2,700 petitioners, many of them people of great property and respectability, who would be ready to support a bill upon proper principles, if it were at all necessary. It so happened, however, that the corporation, or town council, had in their management sufficient funds for paving, lighting, and supplying with water the town of Aberdeen. The petition on the table so stated the case, and evidence was ready to be produced in support of it. Notice, however, had been repeatedly given, that a motion would be made to discharge the order for hearing the petitioners by counsel at the bar: this, to him, appeared very extraordinary indeed, and what he could hardly suppose was meant seriously. It might so happen, however, that those who were anxious to support the bill, with a view to push it through, might seize an opportunity, in the absence of those members who wished to aid the petitioners in opposing a very improper measure, and the house, taken by surprise, might discharge the order. Where the interests of so many thousands were concerned he should think this a very hard case. It must now appear very certain to the gentlemen who supported the bill, that it was impossible to carry it through in this late period of the session. The people of Aberdeen were undoubtedly the best judges of their own affairs; the business

might be safely trusted to the operation of their own judgment and good sense. Counsel had repeatedly attended, but it so happened that there was no house to hear them: the remaining part of the session might be spent in the same unprofitable (and, to the petitioners, very expensive) mode of procedure. He would, therefore, move, that the order for taking this business into consideration should be put off till this day three months.

*Mr. Wigley said, the inference appeared to him to be strange, that because the business was interesting to thousands the hearing should therefore be delayed. He could not well conceive this mode of reasoning, and would therefore move an amendment, by leaving out the words "this day three months," and inserting "to-morrow."*

Mr. Sheridan said, the counsel might certainly be called in and heard, but by whom? By the speaker, and by one, two, or three members. It was well known that, at this advanced period of the session, such was the manner in which the hearing would be attended; but was it a manner befitting a subject in which the interest of many thousands were involved? Notice had three times been given of a motion to discharge the order for hearing the counsel—and for what reason? Had the counsel and witnesses failed to attend?—that would have been a good reason: but was it the fact? Certainly not; from day to day the counsel had attended; and why were they not heard?—because there was nobody to hear them. Because the judges were not in court, were suitors to be denied the benefit of being fully and fairly heard? It was for this very reason he had made the motion. If the good people of Aberdeen could not settle their differences at home—which this would give them an opportunity of doing, and he hoped it would so happen—then let them be heard at a time when gentlemen would attend and give them a patient and full hearing: he should, therefore, adhere to his motion, as being, in his opinion, proper and consistent.

*The question was put, and there not being a sufficient number of members present to make a house, it was of course adjourned.*

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MAY 14.

PROCEEDINGS AGAINST MR. HASTINGS.

## WESTMINSTER HALL.

MR. SHERIDAN'S REPLY TO THE EVIDENCE AND ARGUMENTS OFFERED BY THE COUNSEL FOR MR. HASTINGS, IN REPLY TO THE BEGUM CHARGE.\*

MR. SHERIDAN introduced his observations on what fell from the defendant's counsel with a short exordium, in which he stated, that he should compress what he had to offer within a very narrow compass indeed. He had read all the speeches made by the counsel with the most particular attention, and found it extremely difficult to discover even one point that went to set aside the evidence given by the managers respecting the Begum charge, it not being in the power of counsel to controvert it.

He then alluded to the time consumed by those counsel in displaying their oratory; sometimes in the indulgence of a *sixteen hours'* oration of extraneous matter with which they had loaded their arguments; and sometimes with figurative lamentations at the metaphors used by the managers. The first day had, he said, been occupied by the *learned* counsel in relating a very pleasant story of one Sadut. He went over the narrative, and, with such a ludicrous power as defied gravity, sketched the indignant emotions of two old men whose beards had been spit upon, determining to escape the insult by death, but mutually distrustful of each other's firmness, they appointed a spy upon the poison-bowl, and were in consequence both detected in the indiscreet bravado; at length, however, shame at detected trick was more potent than at inflicted scorn, and they finished in earnest what they had begun in jest.

How this sensible occupation of one whole day could apply to the case in point he was at a loss to imagine; indeed, he was considerably at a loss to discover when the learned counsel were serious, and when they were in jest. They had for instance, with their usual happy facetiousness, taken hold of an expression used by him on a former occasion, and of which, if he had anticipated their use, he should certainly have forborne to trouble their lord-

\* Vide pages 319—367, Vol. I.

ships with the sentence:—he had said, the treasurers in the *zenana* of the Begums “were an offering laid by the hand of Piety upon the altar of a saint:” the learned counsel had scouted this unfortunate allusion, and asked triumphantly, how the lady was to be considered as a saint? and how the camels, part of the treasures, were to be laid upon the altar? Mr. Sheridan said, it was the first time in his life that he had heard of *special pleading* on a *metaphor*, or a bill of indictment against a *trope*. But such was the turn of the learned counsel’s mind, that when he attempted to be humorous, no jest could be found; and when serious, no fact was visible. He insisted, that all the Mahometan laws were misquoted and misinterpreted by the learned gentleman; and that not one syllable of evidence had been adduced to prove what the extent of the Begum treasures were.

He accused counsel of taking up two days to invalidate the treaty of 1785, although, in the end, they admitted the existence of that treaty, by allowing that it had the most sacred kind of force.

He then came to what he called a very serious part indeed—an attack made by Mr. Law on his (Mr. Sheridan’s) character; wherein that learned counsel had accused him of *judicial legerdemain* in the examination of Mr. Middleton; of which charge he should, indeed, be ashamed, if he was not able to clear himself. The question to which the learned counsel alluded, was not asked by him, but by the late Earl Camden, and he (Mr. Sheridan) set Earl Camden right. The charge, therefore, was not founded on the conduct of the manager, but upon a complete scandalous blunder of the very learned counsel himself. It was no easy matter to disconcert Mr. Middleton, for his evidence throughout might be called prevarication personified, for which that immaculate witness deserved to be committed, who knew nothing, remembered nothing, and than whose *memory* nothing was more *memorable*. What! confound and confuse the mind of Mr. Middleton! The idea was ridiculous; and when counsel urged that as a charge against managers, they surely forgot themselves—they were infected with Mr. Middleton’s memory.

The learned counsel ought to have known the difference of situation in which the managers stood, from that in which Mr. Hastings’s counsel were. The managers were to accuse, and endeavour to convict, if they found cause in the process to be-



lieve the defendant guilty; but if anything arose to give them an idea of his innocence, they were immediately to make it known to the commons, that the proceedings might be arrested and the business finish.

Far otherwise was it with the learned counsel—their duty was to have their client acquitted, whether innocent or guilty—they were to take every advantage of a flaw in the indictment, of the contradiction of a witness, &c., for such was the lenity of the merciful law of our excellent constitution, that a defendant was always to be considered innocent until he was found guilty. Counsel was warranted to use every chicane; but the strict line of rectitude was that marked out for the managers, and they must rigidly pursue it.

The counsel, in some respects, had an idea of this, and therefore they proceeded with what they deemed great caution; but in others they lost sight of what they owed to the commons. Indeed, when they brought facts they produced documents to prove they were right, and always had some authority to refer to; nor did he doubt if they had found it necessary to assert that *two* and *two* made *four*, they would quote “Cocker’s Arithmetic” in support of the allegation.—The honourable manager was extremely severe on Mr. Law.

He then came to what he called the conspiracy of Mr. Hastings, Colonel Hannay, Sir Elijah Impey, and others, against the Begums, for the purpose of plundering them of their property; to prove which, he said, there was no necessity of other testimony than referring to the private correspondence, which had, in a manner, turned king’s evidence against its own corruption. This was what no ingenuity could get over—what set all the learned counsel at defiance. Mr. Hastings’s own letters convicted him beyond the power of acquittal.

Upon the passionate exclamations of the Begum, on which stress of her disaffection had been laid, the hon. manager commented with exquisite pathos. He stated her provocations past patience, her injuries too repeated for forbearance—and from, not her enemies by profession, but in the application of a passage from Scripture, the equals of endearing intimacy, the brothers in whom she had confided.

“Woman,” exclaimed the manager, “is by nature, perhaps, a *passionate animal*”—[loud approbation]—“I do *not* say it is a

*moral obligation* to be a scold"—[an approbation louder still]—"but less condemned than men to accident and violence, she must be less apt to cope with it when it comes, either with patience which can be perfect only through suffering, or with that active fortitude which, strengthening while it struggles, sometimes learns at last to check assailing fortune, to encounter, to overcome it! Her weapons are words—her assaults are in her sorrows! What strength she has is from weakness—her best security is from fear! She eludes sometimes, by shrinking, the calamity not otherwise to be escaped! But when all fails—when bruised and broken—though in spite of bending before the storm, she then is not to be bereft of the last sad consolation—the cry of nature, the tears which overflow from anguish, the groans and exclamations which lighten the overloaded heart! 'It was not an *open enemy* that had done me this dishonour, for then I could have borne it! Neither was it *mine adversary* that did magnify himself against me, for then, peradventure, I would have hid myself from him—but, it was thou, my companion, my guide, my own familiar friend—we took sweet counsel together.'

In conclusion, Mr. Sheridan said, the counsel had endeavoured to deter their lordships from finding a verdict against Mr. Hastings by stating, that six hundred thousand pounds had been taken by him from the Begum for the public service, at a moment of great public exigency; that it had all been employed in the public service; and that the nation, knowing of the transaction a few months after it had taken place, had full opportunity of redressing the wrong nearly twelve years ago; that it was impossible to vote that Mr. Hastings had acted wrong, unless they were prepared to do full and complete justice to those who had been injured.

Mr. Sheridan said, he joined issue with the counsel—he fully concurred with them; but such was his idea of the justice of their lordships, that he was convinced they never would be deterred from doing justice from a dread of the consequences. Economical as the house of commons was, he never could believe they would deny justice to the people of India because justice could not be done to them, without calling upon the people of England for a very heavy payment. For his own part, convinced as he was that on this article Mr. Hastings was guilty of having taken from the Begum a large sum of money for the public, on



a charge of rebellion which was ill-founded, he was ready to avow, that it would be impossible to declare Mr. Hastings guilty, without giving to the Begum complete restitution of all which had been taken from her, principal and interest. It was stated to amount to two millions sterling.

The counsel had assumed that the Benares charge also was totally disproved ; but they argued in the same manner, that if it was *not disproved*, the nation was bound to restore Cheyt Sing, to call him from his present miserable situation, whether in a Mahratta or a Mysore camp, to pay back to him the *millions* which had been brought into the exchequer by his expulsion, and to place him precisely in the state in which he stood when he was driven from Benares thirteen years ago. He would go farther—every person *injured* by the acts of Mr. Hastings had a right to full retribution, or there was no justice in the prosecution of the commons ; but he hoped their lordships would not be deterred from their duty by such considerations. The commons were not prosecuting for personal purposes—no, it was to do *justice to India* ; and to suppose that if it should appear the people of India were injured, this nation would merely stop at condemning the man who injured them, while the nation received the advantages arising from his injustice, was a libel upon the country.

Mr. Sheridan trusted that *Mammon* would never be the deity of that house, but to the temptation held out by the *learned* counsel, they would reply in the language of Sir Guyon, in the romance,

“ Mammon, said he, thy godhead’s vaunt is vain,  
And idle offers of thy golden fee ;  
To them that covet such high-glutting gaine  
Proffer thy gifts, and fitter servants entertaine.  
Another bliss before mine eyes I place,  
Another happiness, another end :  
And to be lord of those that riches have,  
Than them to have myself, and be their servile slave.”

FAERY QUEEN b. 2, c. 7.

Here he stopped, saying, if he had treated the subject in any part of it rather lightly, it was because nothing which he had heard or read against him, deserved a serious answer. He was just to the merits of Mr. Dallas and Mr. Plumer, but said that vigour might be crippled into weakness by the cause it had to carry ; and that there could be but little fame in the *arena* by throwing an antagonist who was forced to come on crutches.

MAY 16.

## KING'S MESSAGE RESPECTING SEDITIOUS PRACTICES—SUSPENSION OF THE HABEAS CORPUS ACT.

On the 12th Mr. Dundas delivered the following message from his Majesty,—  
 “GEORGE R.

“His Majesty having received information that the seditious practices which have been for some time carried on by certain societies in London, in correspondence with societies in different parts of the country, have lately been pursued with increased activity and boldness, and have been avowedly directed to the object of assembling a pretended general convention of the people, in contempt and defiance of the authority of parliament, and on principles subversive of the existing laws and constitution, and directly tending to the introduction of that system of anarchy and confusion which has fatally prevailed in France, has given directions for seizing the books and papers of the said societies in London, which have been seized accordingly; and these books and papers appearing to contain matter of the greatest importance to the public interest, his Majesty has given orders for laying them before the house of commons; and his Majesty recommends it to the house to consider the same, and to take such measures thereupon as may appear to be necessary for effectually guarding against the further prosecution of those dangerous designs, and for preserving to his Majesty's subjects the enjoyment of the blessings derived to them by the constitution happily established in these kingdoms.  
 G. R.”

On the following day Mr. Dundas brought up a sealed packet, containing the books and papers alluded to in the passage, and Mr. Pitt moved, “that an humble address be presented to his Majesty, to return him thanks for his most gracious message; to assure his Majesty that the house will immediately take into its serious consideration the subject recommended to them by his Majesty, and to assure his Majesty, that they will adopt such steps as shall appear to them necessary in a matter so highly important to his Majesty's dominions.” This being carried, Mr. Pitt next moved, “that the papers be referred to a secret committee, consisting of twenty-one members,” which was also carried. On the 16th he brought up the report of the secret committee, and moved “for leave to bring in a bill to empower his Majesty to secure and detain all such persons as shall be suspected of conspiring against his person and government.”

MR. SHERIDAN rose: he said he had waited with much attention and expectation to hear some argument used, finding the report so perfectly destitute of any grounds for such a measure; but at last saw that it was not the intention of the other side to bring forward anything like a shadow of reason that could account for their conduct. This was a question, however, of such magnitude, that he should think it criminal to give a silent vote upon it. Before he proceeded farther, some notice was due to that extreme impatience for the question which the minister and his friends evinced, an impatience and a manner of expressing it



which, he would not hesitate to say, was completely indecent ; yet, while liberty of speech and liberty of parliamentary proceedings remained in that house—and he did not believe it could long remain if such a bill passed—he would never so far forget his duty to the country as to allow it to pass in silence, however much it might be the wish of ministers to hurry the measure through the house ; a measure which, to use the language of his learned friend, was one of the most daring, most abominable, and most unprecedented that had ever been offered to the consideration of a British house of commons. He held the minister's attack upon the people of Great Britain to be unfounded, unjust, and impolitic in the highest degree, by falsely telling to the French that the people of this country were so much disaffected and suspected, as to make the most harsh measures necessary to restrain their proceedings against the government. With regard to the report which had been so well and so justly described by his hon. friends, he must say, that when once it came to the knowledge of the people, the moment it was produced must appear to them to be a moment of joy and congratulation, and was so in reality. For after all the great exertions and great talents of this Committee of Public Safety, instigated as they were by the most tremendous alarms that had ever frightened any country, what had they to show to the country as a vindication of their conduct and the fruits of their alarms ? What was to be found in the famous report of the British Barrere ? Shortly this—a number of copies of idle papers that had been printed, published, and circulated, some of them for the last two years, and all of them before the commencement of the last session of parliament. Why, he would ask, had they not been prosecuted at the time they appeared ? Why did not the attorney-general prosecute upon the paper signed by Martin, which he thought, of all others, contained the most criminal matter ? One thing, and only one, had been started that was anything like new, and that was, that these societies had been providing arms ; this, by the way, remained merely as an assertion, for no proof had been given to the house even on that head ; but if it really was so, or if any such treasonable practices existed in the country, were there not laws by which such guilty persons might be brought to adequate and condign punishment ? He believed that no such practices existed in the country, and that ministers and their friends knew

this to be the case ; but it was necessary for them and for their views to keep us in the dark, or rather create some new panic to gain that continuance of power over the people, which seemed so much the object of their wishes. He believed most firmly that this measure was founded on a conviction, on the minds of those who introduced and supported it, that no such practices existed at all in this country, that could produce any alarm, that made this proposal necessary for putting the liberty and the property of all the people of Great Britain at the discretion of the executive government, a power which never had been, nor ought to be given, except in times of actual rebellion, or imminent and manifest danger, which none would be hardy enough to say was the case at present. It was somewhat singular, of all the great men who composed that committee—and he had a very great respect for the characters and abilities of many of them—none of whom had come forward in defence of this measure, or to state grounds for it, except the chairman. The principal argument which he had used went to prove the illegality of conventions; but certainly he could not be serious in using such an argument; there had been many conventions in this country, Scotland and Ireland, for different purposes, and none of them had ever been thought illegal. He had belonged to some, and he believed the right hon. gentleman had; he was sure the Duke of Richmond did; and though they were for the purpose of parliamentary reform, the avowed purpose of those societies, they held their conventions in the Guildhall of London, with the leave of the Lord Mayor of that city, with clerks and other attendants from the Mansion-house at their command, and from thence they published their proceedings and resolutions. In Scotland a convention had been held for a reform in the county elections, and a learned gentleman (the lord advocate) whom he hoped was in his place, presided at that meeting, and gave it the name of convention. In Ireland it was by a convention that the Roman Catholics had obtained that which was denied them by using every other mode of proceeding. In none of those instances had conventions been thought illegal. With regard to the discretion of those who were to be intrusted with the extraordinary power, which a suspension of the habeas corpus act would put into the hands of the executive government, it had been said that there was no danger of its being abused or perverted to improper pur-



poses. On this point he differed widely, and had a right to refuse it, because, having that day seen the frivolous pretexts upon which this bold and dangerous measure was founded, there was good reason to suppose that, if they had the power to detain persons suspected, they would be very apt to proceed upon suspicions equally frivolous. Besides, as it had been very properly said, if they once get the power there may be foul play, and men may be confined upon no other grounds than being hostile to the measures of administration; nor could any man in or out of that house be safe, if they were inclined to misrepresent or distress him. He was warranted in this argument by the calumnies that were daily circulated against him, and others, in newspapers almost avowedly employed by ministers for such detestable purposes. Though he had been for many years peculiarly the object of calumny and misrepresentation in newspapers, they never had, or, he believed, ever should induce him to commence a prosecution against them; and this forbearance was, in a great degree, owing to the sincere attachment he had for the liberty of the press, and which he should be sorry, by any action of his, at any time, to endanger. It could not, however, escape his notice, that in one particular newspaper which was known to be under the influence, if not under the immediate direction, of administration, he was uniformly abused in the most gross and indecent manner. Even this very day he was accused of holding an improper communication with a person outlawed by the laws of his country. Amongst the many prosecutions carried on to support the dignity of parliament, the right hon. the attorney-general should feel himself equally interested in vindicating the characters of its individual members, upon which so much depended in the public estimation. He would not directly charge the ministers with personally slandering him. He would not be so unmanly as to impute to any set of gentlemen the dark and groveling meanness of saying those things insidiously which they dared not mention to his face. If there were any lurking suspicion in the minds of any man, let them come forward and boldly avow them; where there is guilt, let the broad axe fall; public charges he was ready to meet, and confound any one who should presume to arraign him; for, in the whole of his conduct from the beginning of the French revolution, he thought himself entitled to some merit, instead of incurring any reproach. He then de-

scanted on the application which the precedents adduced would bear to the present subject, and particularly distinguished the suspension of the habeas corpus during the American war, which was limited to persons coming from America, and not general, as in the present case. He accused Mr. Burke of having so far concurred in the convention of the Irish Roman Catholics, that his son acted as one of their agents; he admitted him to have been very worthily employed; but the fact at least proved, that the hatred of conventions was not so unlimited as might otherwise be expected. He trusted that there would be abundant opportunities of discussing the principle of the bill in future stages; for, notwithstanding the abruptness and surprise with which it was brought in, ministers would, no doubt, reflect on the responsibility which would fall upon them on a future day; and though he was far from being a man of a sanguinary disposition, he should not be sorry to find that any minister who should advise his Majesty to pass a bill of this magnitude, so hurried through the house, should lose his head upon the scaffold. He ridiculed the wonderful discoveries made by the new committee of public safety, and the opening speech of the minister, whom he called the British Barrere. He reprobated the whole of the minister's conduct on the present occasion, which was calculated to destroy the peace and harmony which subsisted amongst men. There could not, surely, be any real ground of apprehension from a set of men without fortune or connection in the country; and who were, comparatively, few in number. But why not confine the operation of this bill to those societies? Why should the liberties of every British subject be surrendered to the crown for the faults of a few? He would much rather he would make it treason or felony for any society to meet for the purpose of obtaining a parliamentary reform, though he belonged to such a society, and would rather forfeit his life than abandon the cause.

*Mr. Pitt said, he trusted that the head of no member was in danger from such a conduct, as French tribunals were not yet introduced into this country.*

Mr. Sheridan said, that it was not for proposing the measure, but for the advice given to the sovereign, that the minister was responsible.

*Mr. Burke observed, that without meaning in the smallest degree to dispute the magnanimity of Mr. Sheridan in despising newspaper attacks, and never subjecting them to a prosecution, he could not easily believe that his provocations*



were not such as may be easily paralleled. A man so prominent upon the theatre of politics, and who possessed, as he unquestionably did, uncommon genius and activity, must naturally expect to be drawn before the scrutinizing tribunal of a newspaper, and he was very much deceived if Mr. Sheridan, generally speaking, was not very mercifully dealt with; at least, he never knew a gentleman so much in the eye of the public who had fared better with our diurnal censors. He thought it therefore rather strange, that when he declined the invidious task of prosecuting himself those papers in which he was traduced, he should be so ready to confer that employment upon the attorney-general. If his advice could have any weight, he would recommend to the learned gentleman not to accept of the commission, lest he should draw upon himself that animadversion from which he attempted to free his neighbour.

Mr. Sheridan explained. He said that he did not wish for the attorney-general to interpose between him and any newspaper calumnies. He alluded to a charge made against him in a treasury paper, that he had been connected with a person now committed (Mr. Stone), of which ministers were aware of the foulness and the falsehood.

*The house divided on the motion for bringing in the bill—ayes 201; noes 39. The bill was then presented a first and second time, read, and after twelve divisions on amendments and motion made by the opposition, all of which were negatived by great majorities, it was reported, ordered to be engrossed, and read a third time on the following day.*

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MAY 17.

SEDITIONOUS PRACTICES—SUSPENSION OF THE HABEAS CORPUS  
ACT.

MR. SHERIDAN said it was yesterday understood, from the minister himself, that this business was to be brought forward precisely at four o'clock this day: he saw no reason why the house should wait for him, especially as he had been in the house and had quitted it. Perhaps he was now taking a walk for his amusement, but that was not a reason for the house to wait; and as those who disapproved of the bill openly professed to wish for delay, for the purpose of affording to the public an opportunity of knowing the nature of this most alarming measure, he should, without any farther hesitation, move, "that this house do now adjourn."

*Mr. Canning stated, that he understood Mr. Pitt had gone away on very particular business, on which he might be detained for some time, and that he was obliged to attend to superior engagements.*

Mr. Sheridan said that the hon. gentleman who spoke last

was a very young member in that house, which was the best apology that he could suggest for himself, to excuse the assertion which he had made. The business of this house acknowledges no superiority. It is in itself paramount to all. As to the particular occasion of this moment, the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had founded all his argument on its transcendent importance and emergency.

*The house divided—for the adjournment 37; against it 161. The question was then put—"That this bill be now read a third time." Mr. Courtenay opposed it in a very long speech, in which he observed it had been alleged, that such is the moderation and humanity of administration, that this extraordinary power, the suspension of the habeas corpus act, may be safely entrusted to their discretion. Facts are the best criterion:—what degree of tenderness, what degree of humanity, did Messrs. Palmer and Muir receive in the execution of their sentences from the ministers? Men of respectability and character—gentlemen who had received as good an education as any in that house. He had undoubted and authentic information in his possession of the indulgence and humanity of ministers with respect to these gentlemen. He would not have received it, he would not have credited it from public report: the information he would give the house should be from the original letters, which he had copied himself. Mr. Palmer writes thus from the Surprise, Portsmouth, March 8th:—*

*"By the particular orders of Mr. Dundas we are to be put among the other convicts and no distinction made. It was only by earnest entreaties, and the proffered surety of the sergeant, that we are permitted to be in the same cabin with fourteen soldiers going out to Botany Bay. Seventeen of us sleep in this hole, the grating of which is locked at night. The ship is so excessively crowded that exercise is impossible."*

*Mr. Courtenay said, he only introduced this circumstance to show what he might expect from ministers exercising a discretionary power. He did not invidiously mean to throw any imputation on the right hon. secretary of state. In his private capacity he sincerely believed him both humane and generous; but in his official character, reasons of state, perhaps, might have induced him, contrary to his natural propensity, to execute the rigour of the Scotch law against such seditious delinquents as Messrs. Muir and Palmer, who had daringly followed the example of the chancellor of the exchequer to bring about a parliamentary reform.*

*Mr. Dundas replied.*

Mr. Sheridan defended Mr. Courtenay from having intended to make any charge against the hon. gentleman opposite him. He conceived that his hon. friend only meant, in his statement of the circumstances relative to Messrs. Muir and Palmer, to give the right hon. gentleman opposite him an opportunity of declaring whether they were true or not. He agreed with Mr. Grey in complimenting the humane attention of Mr. Dundas, in every other respect, but that of applying to the fountain of mercy to



remit the sentences of these unfortunate men. It had been said, that no such application had been made; but, on the contrary, when he had presented the petition from Mr. Palmer to that house, in which, it was true, he had rather claimed justice than mercy, he was instructed to state that its lateness was occasioned by the petitioner's waiting the result of a memorial to the queen, praying for mercy. The right hon. gentleman had not been quite so candid in stating that these mens' heads were turned by some "illustrious visitants," as he was pleased to term them. For his part, he was not ashamed to own that he had been one of those visitants. He should rather have been ashamed, under all the circumstances, if he had not paid a visit to men, in his judgment, persecuted and oppressed. His advice to them was, however, to plead for mercy, and neither he nor his hon. friend had uttered a word for the purpose of strengthening their enthusiasm. The arguments, he proceeded to observe, that he had heard this night, were totally irrelevant to the question, unless it was to be stated that a convention for the purpose of effecting a parliamentary reform was an attempt little short of high treason. Of the nine precedents which the right hon. gentleman had mentioned, not one was similar to the present case. And if the constitution did survive these former suspensions, the present seemed to be a complete overthrow of the constitution; for it could not be shown that it would survive the present instance. It was not at all wonderful if, after a revolution (such as in 1688), there should be many disaffected persons in the country; and that they should have afterwards broke out into open rebellion; and under such circumstances it was policy to put extraordinary powers in the hands of the sovereign. The hon. gentleman had said that he would rather meet an open enemy, or a rebellion, than the secret poison, the skulking measures, which these societies had propagated and carried on. But was it proved that any such thing did exist? No such thing. The societies bear no such feature or character; and, if they did, their's was a very extraordinary conspiracy, for it was a conspiracy carried on in the presence of everybody. It was an open, garrulous, and stalking conspiracy. The conspirators met in gardens, fields, and in public-houses; they announced, and even aggravated their purposes. Every document relative to their redoubted conspiracy had been published long before the report of the secret committee! The measures now adopted were

infinitely more likely to produce a real conspiracy; they did not go to declare a meeting for the purpose of promoting a parliamentary reform to be illegal; the same measures would of course be followed, but in a different manner. The remedy was not suited to the disease; it was not even stated as yet whether a convention for that purpose was criminal. The right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) had censured the idea of universal suffrage as impracticable, but this was merely a matter of opinion. It was not yet asserted that the maintenance of this theory should be construed into actual guilt. Would ministers propose to imprison and detain all those who entertained such an opinion? If so, it was a severity which must undoubtedly fail of its object. The ministers should be aware of this failure, from a review of their past conduct. They had evinced a jealousy of parliamentary reform ever since the first appearance of the French revolution. But, even from their own declarations, it appeared that the result of their measures had been uniformly against their purpose. The proclamation, which was their first measure, was avowedly more directed against the "Friends of the People" than against any of those seditious societies. Yet that proclamation, it appeared, had begot nothing but tumult and insurrection. Their next measure was the spreading abroad an host of spies and informers. These had only served to increase the general turbulence. Their last measure was a severe system of prosecutions, and the result of these was, according to their own statement, "That a great part of the nation was now actually in a state of rebellion!" In his own conviction, however, none of those dangers had any actual existence. The report of the committee was merely a political artifice. That committee was composed of men in part deceiving, and in part deceived. It was equally suspicious from its manner and its precipitancy. It went to surprise parliament into the strongest of all possible measures, from documents there adduced as novelties, but of which every man in and out of that house was previously in the possession. Ministers were long since in possession of every fact relative to these societies. They had long since heard of their having had sergeants to drill them in back rooms; of their having been mustered at the Cat and Magpie and the Black Dragon; and the only reason why they did not proceed on these informations was, that they knew they were all false. But on the committal of Mr Stone all these fic-



tions were revived ; though, if there were any plot, those two plots must be separate and distinct, as Mr. Stone most certainly had nothing to do with these societies. The conclusion of the report, which formed the only novelty in point of matter, stated that arms had been distributed to some of those societies. It was not stated whether those arms had been received from Sheffield, or whether each man, dreading the excesses of a church and king mob, had determined to provide his house with a musket. No evidence of this kind was furnished ; and, in fact, it was an utter impossibility that such a distribution of arms as was there suggested could have been formed without the knowledge of ministers, and without their knowledge having been obtained at a time long antecedent to the present period. The early industry of the peers, he observed, had been exercised in an uncommon degree to second the management which had distinguished the bringing forth of the report. He held now a handbill, under the following curious title : “ The downfall of Jacobinism, or the plot discovered ; to which is added, the glorious successes of the Duke of York, being an extract from the late *Extraordinary Gazettes*.” This curious combination, however absurd it may seem, was a proof of the diligence which had been employed to excite and spread the general alarm. But he would appeal to the members of that house whether, under all these circumstances, they did not expect a full discovery of some serious and pressing danger ? In the course of last year they had been told that the systems of prosecutions, and the associations of Mr. Reeves, “ which did him much immortal honour,” had totally changed the public mind. In the king’s speech, at the close of the last session of parliament, they were told that the attempts against the constitution were completely checked. On the opening of this session, his Majesty was again made to rejoice that the “ steady loyalty” of his subjects had defeated every such attempt. Since that time, the hands of government had been strengthened by the alien bill, the traitorous correspondence bill, the new levies, &c. &c., yet the house was now called upon to declare that his Majesty had been completely mistaken ; that all those efforts had failed ; and nothing would now be sufficient to preserve the existing government, unless it were to be invested with the undefined exercise of an arbitrary power ! But it was asked why the opposition would not take the word of the secret committee for the existing danger ? He would answer, because

it was not asked. The report was made in such a way as to take from the committee, and from the minister, every share of responsibility. They had laid their proceedings before the house, and if the commons chose to act upon these, the ministers were not responsible. Such a power, obtained in such a manner, he was not willing to sanction. It was asked on a light and frivolous pretence; there was, therefore, every reason to apprehend that it would be exercised on pretences equally frivolous. The sentiments of those societies he looked on as springing from the seeds first sown by Mr. Pitt, Mr. Burke, and the Duke of Richmond. It was ungenerous in them first to instil the principles and afterwards to treat their proselytes with rigour. Such conduct could only tend to inflame the mind of the country, and to fill it with contempt for all public men. He then proceeded to prove that these gentlemen were the authors of the present fermentation in favour of a parliamentary reform, by citing parallel passages from the papers, called seditious, on the table, and the letters of Mr. Burke to his constituents at Bristol; the Duke of Richmond's letters to Colonel Sharman, &c. He inferred that the former, though expressed in less elegant language, conveyed no one leading idea which was not obviously borrowed from the latter. He then made some comparisons between them, in order to show the similarity between the new societies and former conventions. The seditious publications of 1794 say there will be an absolute despotism. Those of 1782 had said that liberty was in danger: "we lose the spirit of honest equality;" such were the words of a right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) whose sentiments were since changed. Another passage, in another resolution, spoke thus: "Wicked contrivances are made to separate us; let us unite with the people." The society to which he belonged—the Friends of the People—and which in the present instance had been the object, though not of direct, yet of insinuated attack, had been uniformly consistent: they had set out with avowing that their object was a reform in the representation upon constitutional principles; and he defied any one to prove that they had deviated from it, in the slightest degree, in any of their proceedings. Mr. Sheridan proceeded to inquire whether if a convention was stated to be held for the purpose of parliamentary reform, the delegates were to be taken up and imprisoned during his Majesty's pleasure? In that case, in his opinion, the only effect would be that



the jails would be filled with men whose criminality was not defined, and at the same time such measures could never accomplish their purpose. If this bill, therefore, was to be obtruded on the public, it would be wise in him and his friends never to set a foot in that house again. He had been asked on a former night what loss would it be if his hon. friend (Mr. Grey) should put his threat of leaving that house in execution? He would answer, that it would be a great loss to the country, not only in losing a gentleman of such great talents, but it would tend to lessen the character of parliament in the public mind; and to show that such would be the case, he would relate the circumstance of a man who was asked to vote at the election for Westminster; "I would not vote," said this man, "for Mr. Fox before, because he was then secretary of state; but I will give him my vote now, because I think he acts like an honest man." Such were the opinions which people were apt to form of the opposition. And if the present bill was to be passed into a law, neither he nor his friends would deem it any longer prudent to attend that house.

*The bill was read a third time and passed by very large majorities, after which Mr. Sheridan moved that the report of the secret committee should be printed, which was agreed to.*

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MAY 20.

SEDITIONOUS PRACTICES.

*A message was received from the lords, stating, that they had received the books and papers presented by the house of commons, and being desirous at all times of having a friendly correspondence with that house, more especially at the present alarming and dangerous crisis, they would, therefore, return the books and papers at any time they might be requested so to do, or as they might be wanted by the commons.*

MR. SHERIDAN remarked, that there was something singular in their lordships' message, for they only said, they would not put the papers in their pockets, but were ready to return them. They were silent as to any measures they had adopted, or meant to adopt; to him there seemed something enigmatical, that a bill hurried through that house with such precipitation, should sleep in the other. He was induced to suppose, they did not conceive the danger so imminent as was apprehended.

THANKS TO THE ARMY EMPLOYED IN THE WEST-INDIES UNDER  
SIR CHARLES GREY.

*The thanks were moved by Mr. Dundas.*

Mr. Sheridan said, he thought that in a motion of this sort,

where the most perfect unanimity would prevail, the right hon. gentleman should have kept perfectly clear of any extraneous matter on which there might be difference of opinion. The right hon. gentleman, however, had entered into a view of the importance of these islands, which he certainly was not inclined to discuss now; and had, very modestly indeed, insinuated some degree of praise to himself and his colleagues as to the plans, upon which he should offer no opinion; and the choice of commanders, for which ministers certainly deserved credit; he did not, however, know with what he meant to contrast it, unless he alluded to certain transactions in the Mediterranean. Upon the subject of thanks to the common soldiers, he certainly agreed with him, and he hoped he should be able to feel a national pride, when he considered that a great part of these were Irishmen. He concluded with recommending to government the employment of the Irish Catholics.

*The thanks passed nem. con.*

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MAY 26.

INSTRUCTIONS TO LORD DORCHESTER.

MR. SHERIDAN called the attention of the house to what was, in his mind, a subject of considerable importance to the country, as, under the present circumstances, a rupture with America must be attended with most ruinous consequences to this country; the ignorance, inability, and inattention of ministers had already involved the country in one war, and he thought it but right that the attention of the country should be directed to prevent the same inability and indiscretion from involving us in another. It had once a happy effect, when ministers wished to involve the country in a war with Russia, when they saw the people averse to such a measure, they thought it more prudent to abandon it, notwithstanding they were supported in their opinions by a majority of that house. If there was any expectation of a rupture with America, he thought it would not be wise to prorogue the parliament for any considerable time, but only by short adjournments, that in case such an unfortunate event should take place, his Majesty might have the advice of parliament on such an emergency. The reasons he had for supposing that such an event was apprehended and likely to take place, was a paper, a



copy of which he held in his hand, and which, by persons conversant in the affairs of America, was held to be authentic ; and if it was not so, he held it to be the duty of the servants of government to contradict it ; it purported to be a reply from Lord Dorchester to the delegates of several Indian tribes, dated Quebec, February 10th, 1794, from which reply it appeared, that his lordship considered this country as on the eve of a war with America. Mr. Sheridan begged leave to read to the house two paragraphs from this reply, to show that, supposing it to be an authentic paper, that his lordship considered a war with America was inevitable, for that their conduct had almost exhausted the patience of this country. He observed, that it was not very probable that his lordship would have ventured such an opinion without instructions from his Majesty's ministers ; and, if they had sent him out instructions, he thought it somewhat extraordinary that when he mentioned, in the course of some discussion this session, the defenceless state of Halifax, the right hon. secretary of state should have said that there was no danger to be apprehended in that quarter, if, at the same time, he was conscious of such instructions having been sent to Lord Dorchester. He concluded by moving, "That an humble address be presented to his Majesty, that he would order a copy of the instructions sent to Lord Dorchester to be laid before the house."

*Mr. Dundas in express terms declared, that it was the first time he had heard of the speech of the noble lord that the hon. gentleman had alluded to. In equally explicit terms he disavowed having a knowledge of any orders being sent from this country that had the most remote tendency to create a rupture with America. He entertained with the hon. gentleman the highest opinion of the prudence and discretion of Lord Dorchester, and was perfectly assured that the noble lord would not do anything rashly. In his opinion the whole paper was a forgery.*

Mr. Sheridan said, he was glad to hear ministers declare that the paper was not authentic ; although, considering the effects it had produced, both in America and in this country, it might have become them to say so without being called upon. He hoped he understood the right hon. gentleman to say distinctly, that no instructions of a hostile nature had been given with regard to America ; and that if the paper had been a forgery, of which he still entertained doubts, that ministers had the wisdom and discretion to avoid a new war. One thing made him still

think that this paper was authentic, which was, that it corresponded with what the right hon. gentleman said with regard to the endeavour to conciliate a peace between the United States and the Indians. He wished to know if the right hon. gentleman knew exactly what the paper was; it purported to be a reply from Lord Dorchester to the delegates of certain Indian tribes. He then proceeded, and read the reply, as follows:—

*Children—I have well considered your words, and am now prepared to reply.*

*Children—You have informed me that you are deputed by the seven villages of Lower Canada, and by all the nations of the upper country, which sent deputies to the general council, held at the Miamis, except at the Chawanoos, Miamis, and Loups.*

*Children—You remind me of what passed at the council fire, held at Quebec, just before my last departure for England, when I promised to represent their situation and wishes to the king, their father, and expressed my hope that all the grievances they complained of on the part of the United States would soon be done away by a just and lasting peace.*

*Children—I remember all very well: I remember that they pointed out to me the line of separation which they wished for between them and the United States, and with which they would be satisfied and make peace.*

*Children—I was in expectation of hearing from the people of the United States what was required by them: I hoped I should have been able to bring you together and make you friends.*

*Children—I have waited long, and listened with great attention, but I have not heard one word from them.*

*Children—I flattered myself with the hope that the line proposed in the year eighty-three, to separate us from the United States, which was immediately broken by themselves as soon as the peace we signed would have been minded, or a new one drawn in an amicable manner: here also I have been disappointed.*

*Children—Since my return I find no appearance of a line remains; and from the manner in which the people of the States push on, and act and talk on this side, and from what I learn of their conduct towards the sea, I shall not be surprised if we are at war with them in the course of the present year: and if we are, a line must then be drawn by the warriors.*

*Children—You ask for a passport to go to New York: a passport is useless in peace; it appears, therefore, that you expect we shall be at war with the States before you return. You shall have a passport that, whether peace or war, you shall be well received by the king's warriors.*

*Children—They have destroyed their right of pre-emption, therefore all their approaches towards us since that time, and all the purchases made by them I consider as an infringement on the king's rights; and when a line is drawn between us, be it peace or war, they must lose all their improvement of houses on our side of it. The people must all begone who do not obtain leave to become the king's subjects. What belongs to the Indians will of course be confirmed and secured to them.*



Children—*What further can I say to you? You are our witness that on our part we have acted in the most peaceable manner, and borne the language of the United States with patience, and I believe our patience is almost exhausted*

*Given under my hand at the castle of St. Lewis, in the city of Quebec, on the 10th day of February, in the year of our Lord 1794.*

(Signed)

DORCHESTER.

*By his excellency's command,*

(Signed)

HEMAN WISSIUS RYLAND, Sec.

Mr. Sheridan said, that though this paper carried with it the appearance of authenticity, and was believed to be authentic by many persons conversant with American affairs, yet, as it had been publicly disavowed, he would beg leave to withdraw his motion.

MR. SHERIDAN'S MOTION FOR ENABLING CATHOLICS TO HOLD  
MILITARY APPOINTMENTS.

Mr. Sheridan said, he rose to make a motion which he had often deferred at the request of ministers, in the hope that they had only to consider it, to give it their assent. The only possible objection to it that he could see was, that it came not from their own side of the house; but it was in its nature no party question, and came forward under circumstances peculiarly favourable, from having arisen incidentally. At a time like the present, when his Majesty was calling for the aid of every description of his subjects to support the constitution, it would, perhaps, be improper for the persons in whose behalf he spoke, to petition even for what they felt to be no more than justice, because their petition might seem like a demand; and it might also be improper for government to grant them voluntary relief, because that might look like a bribe. This was his opinion with respect to all the penal statutes that made distinctions between different classes of his Majesty's subjects; distinctions which every man must wish to see done away at one time or other, and which he should vote for abolishing at once, as often as a motion was made to that effect, but which he could not expect to see entirely done away at present. He was one of those who respected both the rights and the prejudices of the people, for he considered those prejudices as having been originally inspired and cherished by the government. When we were struggling for our constitution against a popish prince, supported by a party whose religious and political opinions were equally hostile

to civil liberty, great pains had been taken to create in the minds of the people a dread and abhorrence of trusting Roman Catholics with any degree of power. When such prejudices had been instilled, and government had reaped the benefit of them, he held it unjust for government to turn round and insult those very prejudices which it had before applauded. Now, however, both the danger from Roman Catholics, and the prejudices against them, had vanished from every mind. The riots in 1680 had not arisen from any dread of the relief then granted to the Roman Catholics, but from discontent with the general system of measures, and the criminal neglect of those whose duty it was to prevent them. Besides, the progress of opinion in the last fourteen years had been great; and many thought that the people were now rather too inattentive to religious differences than too apt to mark them. If the danger and the prejudice were both gone, where could be the inconvenience of allowing Roman Catholics to serve in the army and navy like other subjects? When we were embodying an army of French Catholics, it appeared preposterous to exclude English Catholics from serving their country in a military capacity; and this had suggested to him the present motion.

By the act passed last year in Ireland, Catholics were allowed to serve as officers in the army, under a certain rank. Supposing any of those officers were to be ordered to England on duty, could anything be more absurd than their being subject to very heavy penalties here, for what they had done in strict conformity to law in their own country? The thing was so extravagant, that he was persuaded it could not exist, but by an omission on the part of ministers, in consequence of business that appeared to them more urgent. When Mr. Hobart introduced the bill for the relief of the Irish Catholics, he said, "that with respect to admission into the army and navy, any change must depend upon England; that such a measure was in contemplation in England, and a communication had been made upon the subject." In a debate in the house of lords, on a clause for enabling Catholics to accept of military employments, Lord Farnham said, "that till a similar law was passed in England, Catholic officers could not attend their regiments, if ordered on duty into England. He wished, therefore, that a catholic should not be eligible to a military commission in Ireland until the principle



should be adopted in England ; and moved to reject the clause." The lord chancellor said, " the clause went merely to enable Catholics to accept military employments ; but it could not be supposed his Majesty would appoint men on such posts until the laws of the empire should fully qualify them to act in every part of it. It was more than probable that a similar law to this would be adopted in England before the lapse of two months."

—Such were the declaration of men in habits of official communication with his Majesty's ministers ; and therefore he was justified in supposing, that what he was now about to move had been intended, and omitted only by accident. Catholics did not stand in the same situation in this respect with Protestant Dissenters. A Protestant Dissenter would not be refused leave to serve in the army, if he chose to run the risk of the penalties ; but a Catholic, under certain circumstances, would. A Catholic gentleman of Surrey, of most respectable connections, and great influence in his neighbourhood, had been nominated lieutenant-colonel of a new corps, which he had principally contributed to raise, but ministers did not think proper to allow his commission to be signed. For this he did not blame them, they only obeyed the intention of the law ; but was it fit that the law should so remain ?

\*Supposing one of those commands usually filled by the senior officer to become vacant on the continent, if the officer next in order could prove himself a French Catholic, he would be entitled to succeed ; if he happened, unfortunately, to be an English or an Irish Catholic, he would be disqualified by law. He avoided going into the general question of test acts and disqualifying laws ; he wished to see them all erased from the statute books, but he would not attempt more at once than was likely to be granted. He was not particular as to the mode of attaining the object ; it might be done by extending the time allowed for qualifying, or by framing a new oath, which Catholics could take, and which need only contain an acknowledgment of his Majesty's right to the throne, and a declaration of attachment to the constitution. He concluded with moving for leave to bring in a bill, and reading the form of the proposed oath—" I, A. B., do swear, that I will bear true allegiance to his Majesty, and defend his right to the crown, the laws and constitution of these kingdoms, and the succession to the throne, as by law established."

*Mr. Dundas moved the previous question. Mr. M. Robinson said he should*

*oppose the motion for the previous question, because he thought it admitted the propriety of the measure, but merely objected to the time it was brought forward; and it was a measure which he should oppose altogether, as pregnant with very dangerous consequences.*

Mr. Sheridan said he concurred in opinion with the hon. member (Mr. Robinson) on the previous question, that it admitted the propriety of the measure, but objected only to the season. He trusted, therefore, that ministers themselves would bring it forward in the next session. The services of the dissenters we were not deprived of as we were of those of the Roman Catholics, because the bill annually passed, allowing them farther time to qualify, operated as a check upon the disqualifying laws; but were it not for that bill we should be deprived of the services of all the right hon. gentleman's countrymen, who were mostly of the *Kirk of Scotland*; General Dundas, and other very able Scotch officers, indeed all the Dundases in this country are dissenters; and were it not for the happy intervention of this bill, we should be deprived of their valuable services. He wished to know if any bad consequences had arisen from the indulgences granted to the Catholics in Ireland? Had any bad consequences arisen, or was any likely to arise, from the indulgence granted them here? He wished to know from the gentlemen of the long robe, if any mischief could arise by admitting them to the bar? He concluded by observing that he would not divide the house, and trusted that ministers would themselves bring forward the subject early in the next session.

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MAY 30.

MR. FOX'S MOTION FOR PUTTING AN END TO THE WAR WITH FRANCE.

*Mr. Fox having concluded a most eloquent address to the house, and read several resolutions, the first of which was moved. Mr. Jenkinson rose in reply, and moved the previous question.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that the hon. gentleman (Mr. Jenkinson) who had just sat down, had spoken certainly with the tone of the right hon. minister near him (Mr. Pitt), though not with his ability: he had a right however to conclude, from the silence kept by ministers, that the sentiments uttered by the hon. gentleman, allowing for his warmth and confidence of assertion, were to a great degree their sentiments. The hon. gentleman had on



this, as on most occasions, expressed himself with a degree of confidence which impressed his mind, as it always had done, with an idea, that though the hon. gentleman was not in the cabinet, yet he certainly appeared to be so much in the secrets of ministry as to be properly supposed to deliver their sentiments. No other supposition, indeed, could warrant the manner in which that hon. gentleman delivered his sentiments, unless we were to suppose that he had an hereditary knowledge of politics, and a deep insight into the secrets of cabinets ran in his blood. On the present occasion he could not but conceive that he had passed the bounds (of the instructions he would not say) but of the intimations at least that had been given him by the right hon. gentlemen who were his supporters, and sat on each side of him (Mr. Pitt and Mr. Dundas), for he could not conceive, however their silence might justify the supposition, that they were prepared to accompany the hon. gentleman in all the lengths he had gone this night. Not to follow him through the greater part of his arguments, few of which were of much weight, or had the smallest tendency to refute those of his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox), he should confine himself to take some notice of one or two positions, which seemed to him to meet the question on a fair and manly ground. The hon. gentleman had openly and candidly stated, that the object of the war was the destruction of the Jacobin government of France, in order to effect which our views must be necessarily turned to the destruction of Paris, the only probable means of effecting the end in view. Did the hon. gentleman, or the house, seriously suppose that this object was so attainable as he had asserted? He had relied much on the successes of the campaign—a campaign which he said had begun but a few weeks. He, however, was much afraid that the calamities of the campaign had been much greater than the successes, and that we had gained little else but honour, and certainly honour of no inconsiderable degree had been acquired, especially by the British troops. But on a fair review and a balance struck, he was grieved to find that other advantages had been few or none. In the same gazette, in which we were informed that Prince Kaunitz had driven the French beyond the Sambre, we had intelligence that the enemy had penetrated into Luxembourg, and had forced General Beaulieu to retreat. After the action of the 22nd, which had been represented with great triumph in our gazette as a com-

plete victory (he did not mean to impute any wilful misrepresentation in those accounts, but he well knew that persons who felt warmly interested in any cause always put the best face on the position of affairs) the emperor published a bulletin, which he held in his hand, which did not convey precisely the same idea of so complete a victory as we had been led to expect. The paper he had no doubt was genuine ; and though a great deal had lately been said about forgeries, he believed no imputation of that sort could be fairly laid to this paper. It purports to be a bulletin published at Tournay, on the 24th of May, by the emperor, and does great credit to the heart of that prince, as a proof of his humanity and love of his subjects. After recapitulating the success of his troops in some late actions, he goes on thus :—"The battle of yesterday, that of the day before towards the Sambre, and all the numerous and bloody engagements which have so rapidly succeeded one another, do immortal honour to the talents of the generals and to the intrepidity and valour of the troops. His Majesty acknowledges it with satisfaction and confidence. He is impressed by it with sentiments of attachment and zeal. He esteems himself happy in having such allies and such an army. But he only feels, in the more lively manner, the pain of seeing so many brave men perish, unhappy victims of the superiority of numbers, of the *acharnement* of the enemy, of their own love for their sovereign, of their discipline, and their valour. The advantages of yesterday and the day before are sufficiently known from the result : his Majesty acknowledges that they are owing to the admirable conduct of the troops ; but this victory, bought with so much blood, costs but too much to his heart. His Majesty is deeply afflicted with so many misfortunes and disasters : amid the cries of victory he hears the groans of the wounded. The enemy has lost at least 6,000 men, but the combined army cannot have lost less than 2,000 soldiers killed. The day after 2,000 combatants have lost their lives cannot, to a feeling monarch, be altogether a day of triumph." The hon. gentleman had recounted the capture of Landrecies in a manner truly ludicrous ; he had swelled it into an open object of importance which it did not merit ; and instead of conducing anything towards the real attainment of the object proposed, we were not one inch nearer Paris than we were before it was taken ; but in fact, we continued nibbling round the rind of this country which we were so



shortly to enter in spite of all opposition. However, the hon. gentleman had discovered, that though French opinions might be harmless in themselves, yet, when backed by the power of France, it became necessary to oppose them. The more powerful then, the more we must oppose them; and if they should succeed in conquering us, it would be an evidence of their power, consequently a fresh obligation upon us to exert the last remains of our strength in opposing them. This he took to be so clear, that he thought it was as certain as mathematical demonstration. Perhaps the hon. gentleman received all this as hereditary knowledge. The same language, he well remembered, was held at the time of the American war. It was then said, will you cede to these rebels? If you do, the spirit of revolt will stalk about at home; Ireland will be lost, and the crown itself may be unsafe. If ministers really did mean to avow this as their object, they had not even steadily pursued it; for the West-India expedition was a deviation; and every guinea and every man employed to that purpose was a grand defection from that great object, upon which depended, as we were told, the peace, happiness, religion, and good government of mankind. Lord Hood, who was now knocking his head against the walls of Bastia, was of very little service, if he were even successful in his present attempt, with regard to the final object. We ought not to have endeavoured to pilfer an indemnity, without considering the interests of the allies who contended in a common cause. He was afraid that we could not reproach even our most faithless allies. If all cant and hypocrisy were laid aside, it would, perhaps, appear, that we had entered into this Swiss romance, this mercenary crusade, for no other purpose at first than to share the spoil of France, and afterwards we had graced our iniquity with calling this a war of religion. Mr. Sheridan next noticed some of the transactions of the late imperial loan, and the explanation Mr. Pitt had given upon that subject. This explanation was so curious, and tended to put in so strong a point of view the candour and open dealing of the right hon. gentleman, that he begged leave to read, for the information of the house, the correspondence that had passed on the subject, as given in a ministerial paper.

(COPY.)

Sir,

London, May 5, 1794.

*When his imperial Majesty's minister at this court, and the treasurer-general*

of the Austrian Netherlands, proposed to my house the negotiation of a loan for the emperor of three millions sterling, I made it a special condition, in undertaking the negotiation, that nothing should be found in it contrary to the existing laws, or disagreeable to the government of this country: and when I had the honour of waiting upon you this morning with the imperial ministers above-mentioned, you effectually removed every possibility of doubt on that head, by declaring the negotiation perfectly legal, and by assuring me that government was pleased with its success.

For the satisfaction of the public, I beg you will have the goodness to repeat that assurance in writing.

*I have the honour to be, &c.*

The right hon. W. Pitt.

WALTER BOYD.

(COPY.)

Sir,

*Downing-street, Saturday, May 17.*

In answer to the letter which I have received from you on the subject of the loan of three millions to the emperor, which it has been proposed to you to negotiate, I have the honour to acquaint you, that I am not aware of any law to prohibit a loan to a foreign state in amity with this country; and that, in the present case, government by no means wish to object to a measure for the accommodation of his imperial Majesty, with whom his Majesty is engaged in the closest union and concert.

*I have the honour to be, &c.*

(Signed)

W. PITT.

Walter Boyd, Esq., Albemarle-street.

After some remarks on these letters, Mr. Sheridan insisted, that if, in the course of another year, the emperor could not raise a supply, he must also become an artificial power, and apply to this country for a subsidy. The Empress of Russia, he remarked, had also entered into a very solemn treaty, in which she had promised not to lay down her arms but by common consent: she had, however, hitherto unfortunately forgot to ask her own consent to take them up. So that, of all our allies, one had done nothing; another had done all he could do, and the remaining burden of the war must rest upon ourselves. Our allies the Dutch were far from pleased with our possession of the West India islands, and he wished the prophecy of a person who was supposed to possess the gift of a second sight, might not come true, viz. that his Majesty's ministers would shortly possess every island in the world except the island of Great Britain. The hon. gentleman had declaimed very much on the impracticability of making peace with the present government of France, and had held language which seemed to pledge this country to a continuance of the war to an unlimited period. He and his right hon. friends should recollect that similar language had been held in



the calamitous war with America, and should learn from the example of that fatal contest to be more moderate in such assertions, as there certainly was still more in that war, than in the present, to justify any such unqualified asseverations. There was one consideration which had not been touched on by his right hon. friend who opened the question, which he yet thought deserving the attention of the house, as intimately connected with the subject—that was the state of the country at home. He could not but consider the war as giving rise to a very dangerous system of spreading alarm among the lower orders, to excite their passions against the supposed enemies of their country, in order to throw more power into the hands of administration, and to keep the public from too nicely examining some of the late dangerous proceedings. For this purpose, fabulous plots and forged conspiracies had been brought forward, originating solely in the foul imagination of his Majesty's ministers. He perhaps might be told that, from the report of the committee, the house had sufficient ground to give credit to the existence of such conspiracies. He frankly avowed that he could form no such conclusion from the facts in that report, and he did not choose so far to give up his understanding to any individuals, as to receive the conclusions of men whom he thought deluded, and when those conclusions appeared to him as not founded on anything like proof. It might be said that the house were to expect another report; if that report should bring forward matter sufficient to prove any traitorous designs in any men whatever, he would be among the first to vote for their exemplary punishment, and to retract and apologize for anything he had now advanced; this, however, he did not believe would be the case. Here he could not help mentioning what appeared to him contrary to the first principles of justice and honour. Many papers of the most inflammatory sort had been put into his hand, tending to irritate the public mind against the unfortunate men now in custody, which had been circulated through this metropolis, and over great part of the country. These he had little doubt he could trace, if not directly to the ministers, at least to their agents and persons in their pay. One question he would ask—did ministers mean to give these men a fair trial? He confessed it appeared to him very suspicious. It looked very much like an attempt to irritate the mob, so far to render it dangerous to a jury to acquit these unfor-

tunate persons. At any rate it was an unmanly, unfair, and unjust proceeding, thus to prejudice the people against persons whose innocence or guilt was yet undetermined. He must advert also to the unfair methods which had got abroad into the world, of calumniating himself and the person who, with him, had opposed the conduct of administration. This he should not much rely on, but would put a case for the judgment of the house, that they might determine whether or no they thought it decent to have one of their member's character handled severely, contrary to what he must say was just. Suppose, said the hon. gentleman, a great magistrate of the city, robed in the ensigns of his office, not lightly over a glass of wine, or after a good dinner, but solemnly and gravely in the court with his brother aldermen, should declare that a member of parliament, by name Mr. Sheridan, would be sent to the Tower two months after his assertion, provided the *habeas corpus* act were repealed, and should back his assertion with a bet, and so considerable a bet as a hundred and twenty guineas to six. Would you think this a light or trivial matter? and would not you suppose that such a magistrate, from his known connection with administration, had some authority for saying so beyond his own ideas as a private man. It would not be orderly to name the hon. magistrate, but if he be in the house, he probably may be known by a gold chain he wears. It was well the laws of England were not assimilated with the law of leasing-making; with the assistance of the attorney-general he should certainly have transported the first magistrate of the city of London to Botany Bay. [Here a cry of "Name."] No, said Mr. Sheridan, there is another reason. It is, as a poet somewhere says,

"A name that sounds uncouth to British ears."

Notwithstanding every such calumny, in defiance of any threats, and in despite of popular obloquy, he should still continue to do what he thought his duty, and would challenge one to point out anything in his conduct which would justly subject him to such an imputation. He concluded with giving his hearty approbation of the original motion, as, in his conception, it tended to promote the true and permanent happiness of the people of Great Britain.

*Mr. Pitt in reply said, "the hon. gentleman (Mr. Sheridan) thought proper,*



*without the smallest regard either to probability or decency, to assert that plots had been fabricated, and that these plots had no foundation except in the foul imagination of ministers. The abuse of that hon. gentleman has been too often repeated to have any degree of novelty with me, or be entitled to any degree of importance, either with myself or any of my hon. friends who may occasionally happen to be its objects. But I must own that there is some degree of novelty, indeed, in this mode of attack against a report originating from twenty-one members, to whose character for honour and integrity I will not do any injury by comparing it with the quarter from which the attack was made.*

*Mr. Courtenay called Mr. Pitt to order for having made an improper and uncalled-for attack on Mr. Sheridan. The Speaker wished to state, that there was no rule better established in the house than that, Qui digreditur a materiâ ad personam was disorderly. That whatever wandered from the subject in debate, and is converted into a personal attack, is contrary to order; and in this respect he could not help regarding the expression of the hon. gentleman, "that these conspiracies had no existence, except in the foul imagination of ministers." He begged pardon of the house for an omission of his duty in not having called the hon. gentleman to order when the expression was made use of. Indeed the connection of the speech of the hon. gentleman with the question was altogether so very nice, as to require some degree of attention before its drift could be perceived. He, however, thanked the hon. gentleman who had occasioned the interruption; the expressions were certainly disorderly, however they might have arisen from that mode of attack which had been adopted by the hon. gentleman (Mr. Sheridan) in the first instance.*

Mr. Sheridan rose—

*Mr. Pitt—Except the hon. gentleman rises for a motion of order, I certainly, as having been already before the house, am entitled to speak.—[Here Mr. Sheridan sat down.]—I beg leave to say, that I must always bow with deference to any interruption from you, whose regard to the dignity and impartiality in conducting the business of this house is upon every occasion so evident, and whenever interrupted for any expression that might appear disorderly, and may have escaped me in the heat of debate, I most readily make my apology where alone it is due, to you and to the house.*

Mr. Sheridan spoke both to order and explanation. No man could be more inclined to support the decision of the chair than he was; but he conceived he had been misunderstood. The chancellor of the exchequer had been convicted of being disorderly, by the immediate decision of the chair; and in making what he called an apology, he attempted to intimate that he excepted the person to whom it was at least equally due in common with the rest of the house. This apology for being disorderly, was itself a manifest breach of order. But while the right hon. gentleman was apologizing for his past behaviour, Mr. Sheridan allowed him most readily to make the distinction; for he should

have received his apology with exactly the same sensations of contempt with which he had heard the provocation from him without it. He was as ready as any man to bow to the authority of the chair ; but in this case the speaker had not called him to order at the time. It was the right of every member to state his own conception of order as well as the speaker. He had said, the conspiracy originated in the foul imagination of his Majesty's ministers ; and he must now say he felt no disposition whatever to retract one syllable ; so far from it, he would repeat his words, and his conviction, that these plots and conspiracies had originated in the foul imagination of his Majesty's ministers ; and he must insist, that speaking of them as ministers, and not as individuals or members of that house, this language was regular and in order. Whether the sounds were as musical as the ministers would be pleased with hearing, was another question ; they certainly were strictly parliamentary ; and if it was ever established otherwise, there would be an end of all plainness and freedom of debate. The right hon. gentleman had thought fit to say, that the speaker would not interrupt a speech because it was bad or absurd ; there again the speaker should have called the right hon. gentleman to order ; for it was well known the speaker, in his official capacity, could not tell any member of the house that his speech is disorderly, but bad and absurd. The right hon. gentleman had hinted that a reflection had been cast on the committee of secrecy, and, with a cautious magnanimity, he contrived to place himself in the centre of these twenty gentlemen, for the purpose of applying to them all what was intended to apply to himself. Only this was a gross misrepresentation, for he had made no reflection on the committee ; but no arrogant mandate of that right hon. gentleman should deter him from delivering his sentiments freely. He had said the committee were misled—that he understood another report was to come forth, and if that report should contain matter to criminate individuals, he should wish to see them punished, if guilty, and he should then be ready to retract his opinion ; but the report, to produce that conviction, must be composed of very different materials from the other. With respect to the weight of character in that house, and an allusion of the right hon. gentleman, that nothing which fell from some persons could give him pain, he could only say that when the minister, or any other man, should tax him, in or



out of that house, with a single action which he feared to meet or vindicate, he would allow him, without rebuke, to deal in such insinuations which, by the way, he had indiscriminately applied, at one time or other, to all who opposed his views. He left the house to judge of the manliness of a person who sheltered himself in the shade of his situation. He should take no farther notice now of this part of the conduct of the minister; he dealt in insinuations which, but for his situation, he durst not make. On such a conduct he should make no comment; because he knew there were expressions of scorn and disdain which the orders of the house would not permit him to use. He would never ask, from the right hon. gentleman, an apology for any provocation given within these walls; and he was well convinced that no provocation would ever be given to him without.

*The house divided—for the previous question 208; against it 57.*

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JUNE 16.

SUPPLEMENT TO THE SECOND REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF  
SECRECY.

*Mr. Pitt brought up various papers, by way of supplement to the second report of the committee of secrecy. They contained a letter from Charles Grey, Esq., member of that house, to the right hon. William Pitt, chairman of the secret committee, inclosing a letter signed by Mr. Daniel Stuart, and other papers. The purport of this communication from Mr. Grey to the minister, was to show that there was no communication between the society of the "Friends of the People," of which Mr. Grey is a member, and that of the convention which was held at Edinburgh, after the proceedings of that convention changed their original appearance; after it called itself the "British Convention," instituted for the purpose of obtaining universal suffrage and annual parliaments, &c. The report of the committee stated the propriety of communicating the whole proceedings to the house, at the same time it observed, that the committee were by no means convinced of their having committed an error in their former report, though such error had been attempted to be pointed out by Mr. Grey.*

MR. SHERIDAN made some observations on this supplement to the report; in the course of which he maintained that there appeared in the report something like an intention to insinuate that there existed, between the society of the Friends of the People and that of the British convention at Edinburgh, a connection from beginning to end; whereas it appeared that no such connection existed, farther than that the convention professed to have nothing in view but a reform in parliament; this was evident

from the whole tenor of the letters of Mr. Stuart, the secretary of the society of the Friends of the People, signed and written by him as a private gentleman, and not in his official capacity, directed to Mr. Skirving, at Edinburgh. He observed it was not fair to charge the society with the contents of a letter containing the sentiments of a private person. He complained that a letter, dated the 16th of October, 1793—in which Mr. Stuart stated that he only spoke his private opinions, as neither the society nor committee were sitting—was suppressed in the report, while all his other letters, which the secret committee, by the letter they suppressed, must have known to be only private personal ones, were inserted as the acts of the society. There was, indeed, nothing in any of the letters of which he did not approve; and, from his personal knowledge of that gentleman, he should not hesitate to defend, or even be responsible for his opinions; but the omission of this particular letter, he must consider as a design to implicate the Friends of the People, collectively, in those charges which were brought against other societies. If ministers had any doubts on this subject, he wished to know why they did not send for and examine Mr. Stuart; if they had, every doubt on this business would have been cleared up at once. He did not think any part of this business merited much attention, farther than it proved the inattention of the committee who formed the report, in not making the distinction between the formal signature of Mr. Stuart, as secretary to the society, and that of his name as a private gentleman, to a letter expressive of his own sentiments in the absence of the society. From this inaccuracy in the report in one part, he could not think favourably of the whole of it; but he must again say, he saw in the letters nothing which any well-wisher to the constitution of this country ought to disavow.

Mr. Sheridan said, that for the honour of the secret committee, he had been in hopes that Mr. Stuart's letter of the 16th of October had never fallen into their hands; but now it was owned by their chairman, he thought it completely showed their design of misrepresenting the society of the Friends of the People, by suppressing those papers which might show their conduct in its true colours, and bringing forward only those which they thought would subject it to censure.

*After some debate,*



Mr. Sheridan said, as so many mistakes in the report had been detected, the house had a right to disbelieve the whole; and thus the report was of no value. He could not advise Mr. Grey to practise candour, because he could not promise him a return from the committee. This he proved by the implications and insinuations made in their report. For his part, he could not discover any impropriety in either of Mr. Stuart's letters; nor should he, were they written under his direction, be afraid of any consequences, or ashamed to disavow them. He detected and exposed three untruths in the report, which consisted in the account of the meeting of the society, and the letters written by Mr. Stuart on the 23rd of July and the 29th of October. He said he was sorry the committee had seen the letter which explained the innocence of the society, because it betrayed the malice or the negligence of the committee; and therefore, for their honour, he wished it had never been seen. The suppression of it was certainly remarkable; for, if any doubts were entertained of the society's collusion, it would have been but honourable to have examined the secretary. As the secretary, however, was not examined, and these parts of the report were so inaccurate, he had but a bad opinion of the rest of the batch.

*The supplement was ordered to be laid on the table and printed.*

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JUNE 20.

CITY MILITIA BILL.

*The house, in a committee, went through this bill and made some amendments; and upon the question that it should be engrossed,*

MR. SHERIDAN said, he did not perceive any immediate necessity for hurrying the bill through the house, in such a manner as not even to give the citizens of London time to consider its effects. With regard to the particular clauses of the bill, he thought them highly objectionable, and such as the preamble did not warrant, which carried on the very face of the proceeding something like deceit—for it set forth, that there were some defects in the present militia; and in order to remedy such defects, the bill entirely destroyed the ancient constitutional force of the city. Their present force consisted of 9000 men, which, if properly managed, would be an effectual protection for the city; and in the room of this force, it is proposed there should

from the whole tenor of the letters of Mr. St. John of the society of the Friends of the People, signed him as a private gentleman, and not in his official capacity directed to Mr. Skirving, at Edinburgh. It was not fair to charge the society with the conduct of the sentiments of a private person. The letter, dated the 16th of October, 1793—when he only spoke his private opinion—was signed by the committee were sitting—was signed by the committee. In his other letters, which the committee had suppressed, must have known that the letters were inserted as the acts of the society, and made so pusillanimous in any of the letters. He would not have the honour of from his personal knowledge of the society of its interests in that house, hesitate to defend, or to support the bill came to be understood. The omission of this paragraph was one of the most daring which had been implicate the Friends of the People this session, and was a continuation of which were brought forward to introduce a military government into any doubts on the force of its natural and constitutional force. He send for and to hear from the hon. gentleman, that the present this business was no service, nor had it ever been; he had forgot think any service rendered the country in the time of Charles I. than it presented at the siege of Gloucester; the worthy alderman (Sir report, himself) himself was also a great military commander, ture on a former occasion received thanks for his conduct; name he could not compare him to Prince Cobourg, or the service of Prussia; and it was true, he might want the military of his hon. friend near him (Colonel Cawthorne) but he nevertheless, possess talents sufficient to improve the force of the city, and not lend his hand to destroy it.

*House divided—ayes 70; noes 12.*

#### THANKS TO ADMIRAL LORD HOOD.

*Mr. Douglas moved, "that the thanks of the house be given to Admiral Lord Hood, for his able and gallant services in the reduction of Bastia, in the island of Corsica."*

*Mr. Sheridan said, he was not very hasty in forming his opinion, and therefore not likely to retract them, without some reason or argument to convince him they had been founded in error or misconception; but the right hon. gentleman had not*



stated any ground whatever upon which he moved for the thanks to the noble admiral, but he supposed the fame of his victories, and the general approbation with which they were received by the public at large, had rendered any statements to the house superfluous, or, perhaps, it might be considered a kind of insult to enter into a detail of facts so notorious as the splendid and valuable successes of his lordship. But when the thanks of that house were to be voted to Lord Howe, the right hon. gentleman felt it incumbent upon him to make some short statement of the services performed by that noble lord, though no man could be a stranger to the fact that he had rendered his country the most essential services, and made her prouder in her security. With regard to Sir C. Grey and Sir J Jervis, he had also found it necessary to give some short account of their splendid services, which followed so quick upon the heels of one another, as to astonish the most experienced and sanguine commander; and if the value of the conquests made by those gallant officers were not to be estimated in any other war than the present, in this he could not consider them of such estimation. He sincerely regretted that he had no reason to change his opinion, but he should feel it necessary to oppose the motion of thanks to the noble admiral, to whose gallant and able conduct, upon many other occasions, he was ready to bear testimony; but as thanks were the sole reward which the house had in its power to bestow, and was at the same time the most ample and most honourable reward any man could receive, he thought it fit that due regard should be had to preserve its value and importance, and not to diminish and fritter it away by bestowing it upon trifling occasions, or on persons who had not really merited it; the circumstance of his having received the thanks that night, might be, perhaps, considered as some reason why he should not oppose the same favour being bestowed on another; but it was to be recollected, he was one of many appointed to perform a task which they had executed to the extent of their ability—they had gone through their labour and received their reward, which, as long as its value is preserved, by never granting it but on great and necessary occasions, is certainly the greatest and most honourable reward which a man can receive. The house had a constant eye over their conduct and behaviour on the occasion, and were competent to judge of their merit or demerit; but it was

something different with regard to admirals and generals employed upon foreign service, whose conduct his Majesty, through his ministers, might appreciate, but on which, except by information also from them, the house could form no judgment whatever. It was not likely that any such mean, disgraceful principle as envy could actuate the minds of any officers employed in the service; he did not think it probable that Lord Howe, or Sir John Jervis, or Sir Charles Grey, could feel any envy at the thanks of that house being voted to a brother officer; but, nevertheless, ministers appeared to act upon a principle of that kind, for they seemed to think that Lord Hood might feel something like discontent or jealousy invade his breast, if he did not receive some token of public approbation as well as those officers who had been deservedly so distinguished; and that such was the case was pretty evident, because, neither on account of the capture of Toulon, nor on account of the memorable retreat from Toulon, of which he should speak something more hereafter—nor on account of the capture of Fiorenzo, did his Majesty's ministers ever once think of voting the thanks to Lord Hood. But now, when the thanks, which was the general voice of the nation, grateful for the most essential services, was voted to Lord Howe, they come with the little cock-boat of Bastia into the wake of Lord Howe's fleet, and, under his convoy, wished to steer it into the port of public approbation. He observed, that the thanks were merely confined to the capture of Bastia, and no consideration whatever was had to the whole of the conduct of the noble admiral. He had been sent into the Mediterranean with the best-appointed fleet that ever sailed from the British shore; he had the assistance of the Spanish fleet—or should have had it—or, if he had it not, administration were reprehensible in forming alliances with powers which did not adhere to the terms of the treaties in which they engaged; he had employed a whole year, and had not yet effected his object; for if the reduction of Corsica was his object, it had not been yet effected. He then drew a comparison between the services rendered by Lord Hood and those performed by Lord Howe, Sir Charles Grey, and Sir John Jervis, who had, in so short a time, performed so much. It had been made, in the thanks to those officers, on the ground of the cordiality which subsisted between the naval and military forces; but if he had not been much misinformed, the reverse



was the case at Bastia ; and he instanced the situation of Colonel Lumsden to prove this point. Seven thousand land forces had arrived to his lordship's assistance, at the time that he was entering into articles of capitulation for the surrender of the place ; but this did not retard the negotiation, and he entered into articles highly disadvantageous and reprehensible ; for he consented to land all the garrison at Toulon that they might be employed against our ally the King of Sardinia, or assist at the siege of Turin ; and we should recollect that we are bound by treaty to persist in the war, until all that prince's territories shall be restored to him. He supposed the administration wished to draw a veil over the disgraceful actions at Toulon, in which the faith and honour of the British nation received an irreparable stroke through his lordship's conduct. He could not conceive upon what ground the right hon. gentleman could have supposed him to have retracted his opinion upon this subject, when, early in the session, he had intimated his intention of moving an inquiry into his lordship's conduct on that occasion ; he wished the noble lord was in his place, because it was painful to speak to the disadvantage of any gentleman in his absence ; besides, it was very possible the noble lord might give such an explanation of his conduct as would remove every imputation of blame from him. He, in strong terms, reprobated the offer of the constitution of 1789 to the people of Toulon, and the vain promise of protection given them. It had been said, that every one who was willing to go was taken away, when in fact, the first notice—so great a matter of secrecy was the retreat—these unfortunate persons had, was the blaze of those ships it was found necessary or possible to burn, and then they had their option of running four or five miles to scramble to get on board, and leaving their wives and families without protection or support, or of awaiting the resentment of their exasperated countrymen. Such was the protection afforded the Toulonese. There was, in the whole of the transaction of Toulon, too much negotiating, too much management, neither of which became the character of an English admiral. But the noble lord was not only an admiral, he was a politician. Mr. Sheridan hoped that he should not be suspected of having any recollection of the Westminster election—(a great cry of “Hear ! hear !”)—by the way in which that observation was received, he perceived that if he had, other gen-





to correct the error, and specify by name  
ned.

amendment was negatived, and the original motion put and

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JULY 7.

ADJOURNMENT.—STATE OF THE COUNTRY.

*Long moved, "That the house, on its adjournment, should adjourn till  
ay next."*

MR. SHERIDAN said it might have been expected that, in such a situation of the country as the present, the ministry would have thought it no derogation from their dignity to attend their duty in the house, on the last day of the session in which it was likely any business could be done. There were many points respecting which members of that house were bound to ask for information—information which their constituents in the several parts of the country would have a right to demand of them; and unless the hon. gentleman, who had moved to adjourn till Friday, could say that it was not the intention of ministers to prorogue parliament on that day, he should move, as an amendment, to leave out the word Friday and insert Thursday. His reason for moving this amendment was, in order to have an opportunity of bringing forward a proposition which, from the late events that had taken place on the continent, he conceived to be of considerable importance to the country: he therefore moved that the house do adjourn till Thursday next.

*Mr. Long agreed to the amendment, "because the hon. gentleman who moved it had an opportunity of counting out the house." Only twenty members were present.*

Mr. Sheridan said it would have been more decent for the hon. gentleman who moved to adjourn till Friday, to give any reason for agreeing to the amendment, rather than confess that attention to the interests of their constituents in the house of commons was only a secondary object in their contemplation. He must persist in the amendment; and give notice to the few members present that, on Thursday next, he should make a motion on the state of the country with respect to the war.

*The amendment was put and carried.*

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flemen had not forgotten that event. It called to his recollection a conversation he had with an honest fellow who was concerned in the Westminster election, who asked him "What he thought of the business of Toulon?" I told him I thought it was a very extraordinary business. "Yes, Sir," said he, "I think, when he comes back, we ought to have a scrutiny." Upon the whole, though he felt himself bound to oppose this motion, yet he wished to do it in the least disrespectful manner to the noble admiral; therefore he should move the previous question.

*Mr. Watson observed, that Mr. Sheridan, in adverting to the Westminster election, "let the cat out of the bag." With respect to this business, he said, he had the honour of an acquaintance with his lordship at that time, whose generosity he applauded, and no insinuation that could be made against him would lead him to disapprove of those services, for which he would give his most hearty thanks and approbation.*

Mr. Sheridan, after remarking on the generosity to which Mr. Sergeant Watson alluded, said, that as gentlemen were so extremely partial to precedents, he was surprised to see them depart from them in the present instance. He would therefore move, by way of amendment, that the thanks of the house should be voted to Admirals Peyton and Gardner, Lieutenant-Colonel Vilette, and each of the officers employed in the land service during the operations against Bastia.

*Mr. Pitt said, that there was a strange particularity in the amendment, as it went to overload a motion of thanks for services which the hon. gentleman had disputed. Besides, Admiral Peyton had been recalled from the Mediterranean before the war, and had since waved his flag in the Downs. There was besides another error, as Colonel Vilette had not been engaged in the service.*

Mr. Sheridan replied, that he was concerned that there were not more mistakes in the business, as being more congenial to the proposition. In the case of Lord Hood, the admirals were individually mentioned; but in the present instance, ministers thought fit to deviate from their former practice; they knew that there was a want of harmony and union between the officers employed in the reduction of Bastia. As to the error into which he had fallen, it was such as the first lord of the admiralty had made in another house. But he thought Colonel Vilette deserved the thanks of the house, as Bastia had been reduced to starvation; and he was active in his situation, with others, in cutting off the supplies. He was of opinion, however, that it was a duty in-



cumbent on ministers to correct the error, and specify by name the parties concerned.

*Mr. Sheridan's amendment was negatived, and the original motion put and carried.*

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JULY 7.

ADJOURNMENT.—STATE OF THE COUNTRY.

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MR. SHERIDAN said it might have been expected that, in such a situation of the country as the present, the ministry would have thought it no derogation from their dignity to attend their duty in the house, on the last day of the session in which it was likely any business could be done. There were many points respecting which members of that house were bound to ask for information—information which their constituents in the several parts of the country would have a right to demand of them; and unless the hon. gentleman, who had moved to adjourn till Friday, could say that it was not the intention of ministers to prorogue parliament on that day, he should move, as an amendment, to leave out the word Friday and insert Thursday. His reason for moving this amendment was, in order to have an opportunity of bringing forward a proposition which, from the late events that had taken place on the continent, he conceived to be of considerable importance to the country: he therefore moved that the house do adjourn till Thursday next.

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*The amendment was put and carried.*

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JULY 10.

MR. SHERIDAN'S MOTION ON THE STATE OF THE COUNTRY.

MR. SHERIDAN said he was extremely happy at the attendance of the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) in the house this day; for it afforded him an opportunity to have, what some time ago he despaired of having, a few words at parting; for he feared that his Majesty's minister had continued in the resolution of treating the house of commons as of less importance, for him to attend, than what he might call the pressure of state affairs. He rejoiced also that two alterations had just been made (alluding to the new writs) on account of vacancies made in that house, by the acceptance of certain offices in his Majesty's disposal. They all knew when gentlemen vacated their places that others might succeed them, that this was done for no other purpose but that these offices might be better executed than they were before. He heard one of the writs moved for with regret; that for a right hon. gentleman (Mr. Burke) who, for so many years, had sedulously exerted himself in the public service; but he was happy to understand that the right hon. gentleman was put into an office of profit, suited to his eminent services and abilities. He understood that the minister came to the house to-day, to make a motion for erecting a monument, at the public expense, as a testimony of gratitude to the memory of two brave officers (Captain Harvey and Captain Hutt), and that, Mr. Sheridan said, he had no doubt would pass unanimously. His motion (he meant that which he should make in the first instance) did not go to that which he was sure was the duty of ministers, to advise his Majesty not to prorogue parliament, although in one event it might be followed up by such a motion; for nothing, in his opinion, was more necessary at this moment than that that house, his Majesty's national, constitutional, and best advisers, should continue sitting, to deliberate on important public affairs at this awful crisis. But, before he should proceed to bring that matter forward in the shape of a motion, he should require of the minister some information on great and important points, and on that would depend much of what he had to say on the prorogation. If the affairs on the continent had been, as they now are, in the months of February, or March, or April, he believed there was not one man in that house who would not say that parliament ought to have made some inquiries into them, for



they were certainly calamitous, in an alarming degree, to this country. If events had been, at that time, as they are now, he would say again, it would not be possible for the minister to pass them over, without giving to the house something in the nature of an explanation; he must therefore, now call for an explanation from those who were the best qualified to give it. Not more than six weeks had elapsed since the object of this war, on the part of our government, was avowed; and whatever might be thought of the prudence, there could not be two opinions on the candour of that avowal; it was stated in express terms to be the extermination of the present government of France; it was added, by way of showing the sincerity of that declaration, that we ought to employ the last man and the last guinea which this country could spare for that purpose, if necessary; for that at all events, with all risks, under all hazards, we must subdue France, and dictate to them a form of government. At this period, and under all the circumstances of our situation, did he say too much when he said that, to the conviction of every man in that house, and every man in this country, qualified by information to form an opinion upon the subject, that that object was chimerical and impracticable? and now he was sure he had a right—the public had a right—to demand from ministers whether that object was or was not now abandoned. To demand to know, in explicit terms, what was the real object of this war on our part at this moment? This was absolutely necessary for the people of this country; for without it they could not know what situation they were in, for hitherto they had met with nothing but deception; what conjecture could they form of the future by examining the past? Had there been a hope cherished that had not been entirely disappointed? Had there been one promise made to the people of this country that had not been completely broken? He would venture to say, not one. Ministers, at the commencement of this dreadful war had, indeed, been opposed; but when once engaged in it they had not been denied a single man or a single guinea for carrying it on. They told the house, and they told the public, they had the most sanguine expectations of the most desirable success, if proper resources were granted to them. They were not deserted by the house; they had the most ample resources; they applied to the King of Prussia for a subsidy, to an unprecedented, to an enormous amount; they had it. They applied to the King

of Sardinia for a long subsidy; they had it. They applied for unlimited power with regard to employing French emigrants in the king's service; they had it. What had been the consequence of all this? Defeat, disaster, and disgrace following each other in rapid succession, until we came to the climax of calamity, and whenever inquiry was called for, ministers pressed on the house to abstain from entering into any, alleging it to be a dangerous thing to interrupt the affairs of government; and, indeed, by their rule, it would seem that they expected the house and the public would give them credit for abilities in future, in proportion as they manifested their incapacity by the past; and that they were entitled to support from the public in proportion as they continued to delude them; that they deserved trust in proportion as they betrayed it. They had got a deal of credit in that house, and some with the public, for the wisdom of their plans; now he should be glad to know what they had to say on their favourite plan of marching to Paris. On what ground would they maintain the practicability of that decisive stroke? Did they mean to rely on the assistance of the King of Prussia, a prince stated to have been so fond of military—by the way he should be glad to know whether that prince had actually received any subsidy from this country; and, if he had, what services he had rendered? Whether he had marched any troops to co-operate with ours? and if he had, what their number was; what they had done; and where they were now stationed? What articles of the treaty between him and us the King of Prussia had fulfilled? Whether he had fulfilled any, except one—the receiving of our money? These were points, Mr. Sheridan said, the house of commons were bound in duty to inquire into before they separated, and he did not know how they were to face their constituents without knowing something upon these topics. He was one of those who thought that the King of Prussia had not done his duty to this country for the enormous sum of money which we agreed to give him; for if we did pay him for sending his troops to destroy the effect of French principles in Poland, he was one of those who were unable to discover of what use it was to us that the troops of the King of Prussia should be employed in convincing the Poles that they ought to submit to be robbed and plundered. He did not see what the minister was to say upon that subject, or what defence was to be set up. If the mi-



nister did not imagine that the King of Prussia would have acted as he has done, the answer was, it was his business to have so imagined, for he was warned of it in the course of the debates on the granting the subsidy, and he might have been taught to expect it from experience of the conduct of that monarch. He was warned also of what might be the conduct of the emperor and all the allies in this war; what had been predicted on these points had actually happened, and that so clearly and plainly, that to say they were events which might not have been expected, was a subterfuge unworthy of any man who had any value for his character for judgment or integrity. If, on the other hand, the minister should say, this was not owing to the wilful neglect of the King of Prussia, or to the insincerity of the emperor or any of the allies, but owing to the prodigious number of the French as an armed nation, there again the minister was without excuse; for he knew the French to have long been an armed nation, for he had styled them so himself most emphatically, and he must have either wanted judgment to foresee the event that had happened, or precaution to provide an adequate remedy against it. But, taking it for granted that the treaty with the King of Prussia was a wise one on our part, he wished to know why the forces of that prince were not brought to co-operate with ours in Flanders? And why our own were not employed there instead of being employed in holding out false hopes to the poor royalists in France? He did not profess to be anything of a military man, but he trusted that common sense was of itself sufficient to point out the absurdity of any of the allies, in this war, employing any of their troops to assist the royalists in France, while their presence was so essentially necessary in Flanders. The effect of this policy was now obvious to everybody; we had totally failed of our object in the war. That object, so pompously described by the minister, was now become totally impracticable. Instead of destroying the present government of France, receiving indemnity for the past and security for the future, and forming such a government for France as shall appear to be a proper one, we were now at war for the defence of Holland! In this view of our affairs, he could not think it unreasonable for that house to call on the minister to say explicitly whether government still persevere in their declared object of this war? And in asking this question he observed, that he should have much more satisfaction if the

right hon. gentleman, who was now reposing in the cool shade of the chiltern hundreds, was present, for it seemed he was to be war minister; but on account of the public he must demand, and he was sure he was entitled to an answer—what is now the object of the war? The project of destroying the government of France was the most unfortunate, as well as the most foolish, that ever entered into the head of any man; and yet that right hon. gentleman he had hinted at, who was now absent, had said, we must either destroy the government of France or perish in the attempt. This assertion, coupled with the absence of the gentleman who made it, was, under all the circumstances, an additional reason why parliament should not be prorogued now. As to the manner in which it had been thought proper to unite different persons under one administration, for conducting the present war, Mr. Sheridan was pointedly severe on the inconsistency of the minister and of his new associates, contrasting their present union with the avowed principles held by the whig party, as expressed in the year 1784 and insisted upon in the last session of parliament, that it was inconsistent with the dignity of parliament to countenance the manner in which the present administration had got into power, until some atonement had been made by them for the violation of the principles of the constitution; something of an extraordinary nature, he insisted, must have happened, before such persons could have sacrificed their consistency, and, in his opinion, their honour—either that the present administration was weak, and inadequate to the task they had undertaken; an idea which, whatever the public might think of them in other respects, they would never allow—or that the country was in such a situation as to call for an union of party without any regard to consistency of character—or that the responsibility of proceeding on the present system, ought to be divided between ministers and those who had constantly opposed all their measures. In either of those events he was entitled to call for an explicit declaration of the object of the war, for in any view of it the event conveyed an idea of the desperation of the cause—perhaps, indeed, he should be told that the success of the allies had tended to unite the French, but that now their project had failed, the French would again quarrel among themselves—he believed that this idea would meet with nothing but the most severe censure of the public. Most particularly, he felt it his duty to press



an inquiry as to the situation of this country and the King of Prussia, and that was the first point of what he had to submit to the house; we had voted a large sum of money to that prince, and it did not appear that he had done anything towards performing his part of the engagement; and on that particular account the house was entitled to an explanation, and the public, through their medium, expected to be satisfied in that respect.

With regard to America, he said that there was not anything more odious than the whole character of the present administration of this country. Every person who had any correspondence from that country knew that to be a fact. It was true there were two parties in America. The one violent and rash, favourers of the principles of the French in their most blameable excess; the other wise and moderate, and willing to sacrifice a great deal for the sake of preserving the blessings of peace; but, to a man, they censured the character of the present administration. If ministers thought otherwise, they had either been very ill-informed, or very inattentive upon that subject. He mentioned, on a former occasion, a paper containing a speech of Lord Dorchester to the Indians; and then the right hon. secretary of state had been pleased to treat it as a forgery: yet this turned out to be authentic. Now he wanted to know whether this was avowed by ministers, and if it was agreeable to the direction which they gave to that noble lord, and what was now intended to be done in consequence of it? If ministers should say this was a point on which they could not give any satisfaction, he should not press it any farther; but he thought it his duty to mention it, that the ministers might avail themselves, if they thought fit, of an opportunity of satisfying the public upon that very important subject. Perhaps, indeed, the Americans relied on the character of the administration of this country; and, having witnessed the petty, miserable, annual expedients they had adopted, thought they would retract anything they had advanced, and for that purpose had given Mr. Jay full power and distinct directions to negotiate; but, as nothing that could be done by administration could possibly satisfy the Americans, without the express recognition of parliament, he thought that of itself a very good reason why parliament should not at this time be prorogued. Upon this head he should only submit to the minister the propriety of his giving some satisfaction to the

public. If the minister should be inclined to give the house any information with respect to America ; if he was inclined to give any explanation with regard to, and the subsequent conduct of, the King of Prussia, if he was willing to give the house, in short, any explanation with regard to the present war, as to the present object of government in carrying it on, or to afford the public any light on our present situation, then he should follow up his first motion with another, to address his Majesty not to prorogue parliament until an opportunity should be had of receiving such information ; but if, on the contrary, no such information was to be given, the subsequent motions would be useless, and he should not attempt to make them. On looking at the conduct of the King of Prussia, he observed, it was impossible not to advert to the conduct of all our allies, particularly on the point of faith in the punctual observance of engagements. We were told that we could not propose any terms of peace with the French, because they have not a government to be depended upon. It was not their want of morality or religion, but their want of a regular government, that was our objection to treating with them. What was this but an insolent mockery to the common sense of mankind ? What has been done to prove the good faith of the King of Prussia to be depended upon ? What has been done by the emperor to prove that he was to be depended upon ? What has been done by the King of Sardinia to prove that he was to be depended upon ? What has been done by the King of Spain to be depended upon ? What has been done by the Empress of Russia to prove that she was to be depended upon ? In short, what, he would ask, had been done by any of our allies, separately taken, or all of them jointly, that was to be depended upon ? And how long were the people of this country to be the dupes of all the other powers in Europe, in this mad crusade ?—Here Mr. Sheridan entered into a detail of various particulars of affairs on the continent, and in the Mediterranean, and maintained that the only power in Europe which had been faithful to its promise, was that of France, which, although he blamed its excesses, he was bound to confess had been punctually observant of its promise. It had promised to drive its enemies, and it had done so. It had avowed an enmity with the despots of Europe, and manifested its sincerity by the most tremendous exertions. Why, therefore, was France to be called



the only power in Europe on whose promise no reliance could be placed? Only because it was the only power in Europe that had been faithful to its promise! He wished to hear no more of this style of insolence to the public; indeed, he had some hopes that the high characters who had now, with so much sacrifice to their consistency, and, he must still insist, with so much sacrifice to their honour, taken an active share in administration, would reflect on the situation they are in, and remember that now they partake of the responsibility attached to the conduct of this war; a war which one of them, who is now to be a war minister, had described to be, "*Bellum usque ad internecionem*."—He had hopes, he said, that they would reflect on their situation and on the situation of this country, and exert their efforts to put an end to this insane system. He hoped they would reflect on the warning given to them by his right hon. friend. But if, deriding all demonstration and experience, this ruinous and mad crusade was really to be persevered in; if this infatuated administration had gained nothing by their new alliance but an additional infusion of rashness and obstinacy; he was confident the hour was not far off, when the duped and deluded people of this country would lose at once their credulity and their patience, when a solemn hour of account would come; an hour which their having seduced others to share the peril of, would neither ward off nor protract, when the eyes, the hopes, the hearts of the nation would be turned to one man, to his right hon. friend, of whom he spoke more willingly in his absence (Mr. Fox was not in the house), a man in whose mind, however its generous nature might be wounded by a separation from long-formed and dearly-cherished connections, he was confident there would ever be found a paramount attachment to the safety, the prosperity, and independence of his country, and to the liberty and happiness of man in general; a man who, at this very moment, he believed, did not appear less to the public eye for being more alone; on the contrary, who seemed to stand on higher ground from being less surrounded. To him, in the stormy hour, the nation would turn, and they would find him,

" Like a great sea-mark, standing every flow,  
And saving those that eye him."

Mr. Sheridan observed that, in all the points in which he could view our present situation, he saw abundant reason for parlia-

ment entering into an examination of it, and coming to some determination for the satisfaction of the public. He concluded with moving,

“That there be laid before the house an account of monies issued to, and received by, the King of Prussia, signed at the Hague, the 19th of April, 1794, together with an account of the troops which have been employed in concert with his Majesty's troops, in pursuance of the same treaty.”

*Mr. Grey supported and Mr. Pitt opposed the motion.*

Mr. Sheridan, in reply, expressed his thanks to Mr. Pitt for having explicitly avowed that the object of the war was the destruction of the government of France; at the same time he deeply lamented this determination of ministers. Had not the experience of two campaigns shown them the impracticability of the attempt? Would not the disgraces and disasters we have suffered, within the last six weeks, convince every man of the dangerous situation into which the country had been plunged by the rashness of the administration proceeding on the principle that we had no security for peace in treating with the present government of France, which, in fact, was the only government that had kept its faith; not indeed with their allies, for France had none, but the rulers of France had pledged themselves to the people that they would re-conquer Toulon, and they kept their word; they had promised to invade Flanders, and they had totally overrun it; so that it should seem, that the republican government of France was the only one in Europe which appeared to be true to its engagements; for, had not the King of Prussia basely violated his engagements to this country? Was it not the fact, that instead of sending the troops for which he had been paid by us, and which were to have co-operated with the British in Flanders, who, in consequence of his breach of faith, had been exposed to a situation in which their valour was unavailing; that he had employed them for the detestable purpose of plundering and murdering the distressed Poles, in conjunction with the Empress of Russia, who had likewise failed in performing her engagements? for she had not furnished a man nor a rouble towards the object of the war, although we had stipulated not to make peace without her concurrence. At the time that the British fleet, with inferior force, for which ministers deserved reprobation, were gloriously combating the



enemy, had not the Spaniards refused to send out a fleet to capture, or to make the attempt on the American fleet, which the French regarded as their grand resource, the sailing of which for France had been previously known almost for the space of a year? Was it not true that the Dutch, who were so proudly styled one of the great maritime powers, had not a single ship of the line at sea to assist us? The emperor had failed in his engagement of keeping up the number of troops he promised, as had the King of Sardinia. This country had also violated its faith to the Toulonese, by infringing the terms on which they had surrendered their town; and also with regard to the hopes held out to the royalists in Normandy of assistance from us, when we had contented ourselves with keeping a body of troops on the coast of Hampshire. Thus it appeared, that the French government was the only one that appeared to have no privilege to break its faith, which all the allies had done as they found occasion. It appeared to him, that ministers had a patent for mis-stating facts. On a former occasion, the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had, with that pompous declamation which he could assume when it answered his purpose, descanted on the great importance of the Netherlands to the general cause; but now that the French had possession of these provinces, the language of that gentleman was, that we ought not to be discouraged at a trifling check, or any accidental advantage gained by the enemy. He always had a high idea of the courage of that hon. gentleman; he was so valiant that he would by no means be qualified to defend a fortification, for he would not be able to confine himself within the ramparts. He said the right hon. gentleman had so particularly alluded to his parliamentary conduct, and the opposition he always gave to the measures of government, that he thanked the right hon. gentleman for giving him that opportunity of replying to this charge, which he was pleased to bring against him. He had no hesitation in denying the fact, and he defied the right hon. gentleman to point out an instance of his opposing any measure of government which was actually necessary, or had obtained the sanction and approbation of parliament. Upon such occasions, he might ask the right hon. gentleman if he had ever opposed the supplies for carrying into execution the necessary operations which had been approved by parliament? The system and object of the war, and the con-

duct in carrying it on, he had opposed, because he saw it was absurd, erroneous, and destructive to the country; and, upon all occasions where he had opposed, he had fairly and candidly stated his reasons for opposition, which the right hon. gentleman glossed over by a general charge, of his having uniformly opposed every measure suggested by government for a prosecution of the war. The right hon. gentleman had instanced the opposition he had given to the Prussian subsidy, the subscriptions, and the French emigrant bill. As to the Prussian subsidy, it was rather unfortunate for the right hon. gentleman's attack that he had opposed it on the ground that no dependance could be placed on his Prussian Majesty; and that he had warned ministers of the probability of the troops bargained for being employed against the Poles instead of the French, but he had voted for the money being raised; his only objection was to the mode of expenditure, and the event justified his conduct. In like manner, when he opposed the measure of subscription, it was on constitutional grounds; but he had expressly said that he had no objection thereto, when it should have received the sanction of parliament. The French emigrant bill he opposed on the ground of its impracticability, for he could not think it possible for ministers to send these unfortunate men into France, who were certain of being executed if taken by their countrymen; and it appeared that, notwithstanding the pompous declaration of the secretary of state (Mr. Dundas), that he expected five hundred thousand emigrants would be embodied, one hundred were not in arms. On the subject of the Prussian troops, the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had enveloped himself in mystery. The terms of the treaty with his Prussian Majesty were, that by the 24th of May last they were to have been at the place of their destination to co-operate with the British: this place must, of course, be Flanders; but now it seems it is a state secret where those troops are, or rather a secret to all the world. He had always opposed the doctrine of placing confidence in ministers; and, on a former occasion, he had been supported in his opinion by Mr. Wyndham, whose absence he regretted on this occasion, as he would have expected his coincidence as formerly, on this important point, that no minister had a right to infer that there existed a spirit of disaffection in those who would not give implicit confidence to government in any means



which they chose to adopt in carrying their measures into effect. He trusted, that when the gentlemen who were coming into administration should have considered the state of responsibility in which they were to stand, they would relax somewhat with regard to the extremity to which Mr. Pitt had said the war was to be carried, that we must exterminate the French ; for, however the right hon. gentleman might quibble in his expressions, such was certainly the precise meaning of them. It had not appeared that the French had asked us to interfere in their concerns ; as they seemed well satisfied with their present government, we had no right to interfere with it. He lamented the dereliction of principle in the Duke of Portland and Mr. Wyndham, who had uniformly declared that they could not act with the present administration, on account of the manner they had come into office in contempt of the house of commons, and the measures they afterwards pursued. As the day of account must at length arrive, he trusted these gentlemen would consider the perilous situation in which they stood in uniting themselves with Mr. Pitt, and adopt timely measures for the restoration of peace, before it should be too late—while we possessed the means of making it on equitable terms. His object was unequivocally to acknowledge the French republic.

He was persuaded, with his friend (Mr. Grey), that we should be compelled to do as we had done in the case of the American war ; it was then objected that we could not treat with the infamous congress, but eventually we were obliged to submit to this humiliation. Now it was said we cannot treat with the government of France, which yet we must certainly do in the end, for it cannot be supposed that we are to carry on war while there is a man or a guinea in the country. The right hon. gentleman had objected to his using the word “despot,” as one adopted by the members of the French convention ; but no insinuation of that kind should have any effect on him : if, by the word “monarch” was meant the first magistrate of any well-governed state, he would not apply it to the despot of Petersburg, or the despot of Berlin, who had been guilty of such an atrocious breach of faith, such plunder and murder in Poland ; for, in speaking of such nefarious actions, he could not be very nice in the selection of his words. The right hon. gentleman, in speaking of these our worthy allies, had used the phrase “regular

governments," not a very elegant one, in his opinion ; he had, however, no objection to the use of it, and thought that the French were as much entitled to it as any other, if we were to judge from the regularity and discipline of their armies, by which they had conquered the most renowned troops in the world. France had at least been consistent in her threats and promises ; we had felt that all she had said or promised to do against her enemies she had done ; and that all we and our allies had promised to one another was still undone. With regard to the object of the war, he was extremely happy that he had brought on this discussion, because it had drawn from the right hon. gentleman an explicit declaration of his precise view ; how satisfactory and gratifying it would be to the country to know what these views were, was another question. He had no doubt the hon. gentleman would persist in his opinions and measures : the proceedings of that day evinced his usual obstinacy. Indeed, he should not expect him to retract ; he knew well the loftiness of his tones even when manifestly wrong, and his dislike to apologize for the absurdity of his conduct. The day, however, would soon come when his conduct and his views would appear to the country equally disgraceful, resulting from a degree of vanity and rashness, bordering, in his opinion, upon insanity.

*The question was put and negatived without a division.*

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DECEMBER 30.

CLANDESTINE OUTLAWRY BILL.

*The speaker was proceeding to read this bill for the purpose of opening the business of the session, when*

MR. SHERIDAN rose and said, he was sorry to present himself to the chair at this moment, but particular circumstances made it absolutely necessary. He was compelled at that moment to state some objections to a proceeding which had usually passed without any observation—he meant the question which was now before the house, whether the bill to prevent clandestine outlawries be now read ? He objected to putting that question upon this ground—it had been the uniform practice of the house to read that bill on the opening of every session of parliament, before they proceeded to take his Majesty's speech into consideration ; this he understood to be a custom for the purpose of expressing the right of the house of commons to proceed to any business



previous to taking into consideration the speech from the throne. He thought this right not an useless, barren trifle, but a right to be insisted upon whenever an occasion should occur for any practical good purpose. He conceived the opportunity was now come for asserting that right, and this he did for enforcing the principle in the strongest manner possible. With that view he must object in form to the reading of the bill now proposed to be read, in order to introduce a motion upon another subject. We were now called upon seriously to advise his Majesty, in a time the most extraordinary, in a situation the most critical and alarming, upon a subject of the utmost importance to the country at large, as well as to every member of that house; and, before they could say they were in a proper situation to give fit advice to his Majesty, in a free, fair, and impartial manner, it was essentially necessary they should themselves be free, which could not, with any colour of reason, be said to be the case while the habeas corpus act remained suspended. His object, therefore, was, after this question was negatived, to move for leave to bring in a bill to repeal the act of the last session of parliament, which suspended the habeas corpus act. He was confident there could be no objection from ministers to this mode of proceeding, unless they would assert that there does exist, at this moment, the same paramount necessity as that on which they grounded the suspension of the habeas corpus act, thereby depriving every Englishman of a right which is most dear to him. If he was told that the bill which he now wished to repeal had but a very short time to run; or, if he should be told it was intended to be renewed, he would answer that he would not suffer such a bill to die a natural death; that he would not wait a month, a week, a day, or a single moment, after the meeting of parliament, without calling on that house to act as independent, honourable, and free agents for the public, but would defend those rights of the people which had been invaded by ministers; rights which the people, if fairly left to the exercise of them, would never abuse. He concluded with saying that, unless the house should testify a disinclination to the measure, he should move for leave to bring in a bill to repeal the act of the last session of parliament for suspending the habeas corpus act.

*After some debate,*

Mr. Sheridan rose again, and replied shortly to all the obser-

vations which had been made on his proposed motion. He said that the bill, the reading of which he opposed, was a bill for preventing clandestine outlawries. He had no objection to such a bill; but what he chiefly had in view was to prevent a bill for the clandestine outlawry of the habeas corpus act, and the best securities for the lives and liberties of the people. When the right hon. gentleman spoke of the suspension having been voted on solemn deliberation, he was not in the highest form of memory, for it was hurried through the house with unprecedented precipitation, in only two days, and without even the formality of a previous notice. By the trials for treason, and the declaration of a learned gentleman, it appeared that there were at least two culprits, viz. the attorney and solicitor-general, who had either prosecuted persons who were not engaged in the supposed conspiracy, or neglected to bring forward the evidence to convict them, although they were in possession of such evidence. He was under no necessity of persisting in his motion now; he could make it at any time he pleased. He had hinted already, that if the house did not wish to hear it now, he would not now persist in it. The time would soon come when the subject should be seriously discussed. He took, therefore, this opportunity of giving notice, that as every word he had heard from the other side of the house had confirmed him in his opinion, that the suspension of the habeas corpus act was intended to be renewed, he should take the earliest day he could to bring forward the discussion. He was determined to allow no time to concert plans for exciting alarms; no time to make fresh false accusations; no time to marshal and arrange spies; but to call at once, upon the ministers, for their reasons for continuing to deprive the people of this country of their dearest rights, after every honest man was convinced that the whole story of plots and conspiracies was nothing but a wicked fabrication. He then took notice of the observations of Mr. Sergeant Adair, as to the right a member of parliament had in that house to revise the opinion of a jury. He differed entirely from the learned sergeant, for he thought that house was the last place in England in which such a subject should be arraigned. He took notice also of the observation of the chancellor of the exchequer, of the grand jury having found the bill against the persons who were tried for high treason. That right hon. gentleman had forgotten to take notice that a



secret committee in that and in the other house of parliament, had previously found their bills upon the very same subjects by their reports. This, amongst others, was a very strong reason why that house should be very cautious in saying or doing anything that might tend to counteract the impression which the verdicts of acquittal had justly made on the public mind; because it would appear, by their second interference in this extra-judicial proceeding, as if they were endeavouring to support their own former decision against the honest opinion of mankind in general. He observed also, that now the charge of high treason, or treasonable conspiracy, was given up, even by the minister himself; but for the purpose of continuing the suspension of the habeas corpus act, he might find it serviceable to his views to allege there existed a species of minor conspiracy; and it ought to be remembered, that if this minor conspiracy only had been alleged originally, the minister would not have been empowered by law to seize the papers of the accused party; for nothing short of a positive charge of high treason could have justified that step. He concluded with giving notice, that he should to-morrow name the earliest day possible for the discussion of this important subject.

*The bill for preventing clandestine outlawries was then read.*

THIRD SECRETARY OF STATE.

Mr. Sheridan said, he was sorry to interrupt the business of the day a second time; but what he had now to state was an important point of order. He thought he saw an illustrious stranger (Mr. Dundas) in the body of the house, to whom, whatever might be his merits, to pay any greater degree of attention than to other strangers, was irregular. By Mr. Burke's bill, which abolished the office of third secretary of state, and enacted, that if his Majesty, at any future period, should think proper to revive the office, the person appointed to it, if a member of the house of commons, should vacate his seat, he apprehended the right hon. gentleman was no longer a member. Lord Grenville, they all knew, was secretary of state for the foreign department; and he wished to know whether the Duke of Portland and the right hon. gentleman was one secretary of state, or two secretaries of state; because, if they were two, he conceived that the right hon. gentleman, from the nature of his office, must be the third secretary of state.

*Mr. Pitt replied, and accused Mr. Sheridan of a want of candour towards Mr. Dundas, in endeavouring, as he had done on the former discussion, to inveigle and entrap him into a delivery of his sentiments in that house, and immediately to found on that circumstance, an accusation which would subject Mr. Dundas to a penalty of £500.*

Mr. Sheridan said, it was extraordinary that an attack should be made on him for want of candour, accompanied by an accusation of an attempt to inveigle and entrap the honest simplicity and innocence of the right hon. secretary, in order to make him pay the sum of £500; if this had been so, he, however, thought Mr. Dundas fully able to pay such a sum out of the emoluments of his places, which certainly were not inconsiderable. According to the chancellor of the exchequer, the Duke of Portland was the nominal third secretary of state: a more respectful mode of mentioning his ministerial office might have been adopted by his new friends. What confirmed him in the opinion that Mr. Dundas must be the third secretary of state was, the right hon. gentleman's declaration on a former occasion, that he had accepted the office he then held merely as a temporary accommodation to his Majesty's service, and that he never went to bed at night, or rose in the morning, without feeling that he had undertaken more business than he was able to perform. In consequence, he thought the great political Alcides had been called in from Burlington House, *ut quiescat Atlas*. It was lamentable to see an act, which was one of the many that did honour to the political character of its author, violated in the spirit, if not in the letter, by those who had been the loudest in its praise. Calling the Duke of Portland the third secretary of state, was a mere juggle to evade the act; and the old ominous seals held by Lord George Germaine, more particularly ominous from the similarity of circumstances, were rummaged out. Great as his respect for that nobleman was, he should always lament that he had condescended to take them into his possession.

*After some further conversation this subject was dropped.*

#### ADDRESS ON THE KING'S SPEECH.

*His Majesty opened the session with the following speech to both houses:—*

*My lords and gentlemen,*

*After the uniform experience which I have had of your zealous regard for the interests of my people, it is a great satisfaction to me to recur to your advice and assistance, at a period which calls for the full exertion of your energy and wisdom. Notwithstanding the disappointments and reverses which we have expe-*



rienced in the course of the last campaign, I retain a firm conviction of the necessity of persisting in a vigorous prosecution of the just and necessary war in which we are engaged. You will, I am confident agree with me, that it is only from firmness and perseverance that we can hope for the restoration of peace on safe and honourable grounds, and for the preservation and permanent security of our dearest interests. In considering the situation of our enemies you will not fail to observe, that the efforts which have led to their success, and the unexampled means by which alone those efforts could have been supported, have produced among themselves the pernicious effects which were to be expected, and that everything which has passed in the interior of the country has shown the progressive and rapid decay of their resources, and the instability of every part of that violent and unnatural system, which is equally ruinous to France and incompatible with the tranquillity of other nations. The states-general of the United Provinces have nevertheless been led, by a sense of present difficulties, to enter into negotiations for peace with the party now prevailing in that unhappy country. No established government or independent state can, under the present circumstances, derive real security from such negotiations: on our part they could not be attempted, without sacrificing both our honour and safety to an enemy whose chief animosity is directed against these kingdoms. I have great pleasure in informing you, that I have concluded a treaty of amity, commerce, and navigation with the United States of America, in which it has been my object to remove, as far as possible, all grounds of jealousy and misunderstanding, and to improve an intercourse beneficial to both countries. As soon as the ratifications shall have been exchanged, I will direct a copy of this treaty to be laid before you, in order that you may consider of the propriety of making such provisions as may appear necessary for carrying it into effect. I have the greatest satisfaction in announcing to you the happy event of the conclusion of a treaty for the marriage of my son, the Prince of Wales, with the Princess Caroline, daughter of the Duke of Brunswick: the constant proofs of your affection for my person and family, persuade me that you will participate in the sentiments I feel on an occasion so interesting to my domestic happiness, and that you will enable me to make provision for such an establishment as you may think suitable to the rank and dignity of the heir-apparent to the crown of these kingdoms.

Gentlemen of the house of commons,

The considerations which prove the necessity of a vigorous prosecution of the war will, I doubt not, induce you to make a timely and ample provision for the several branches of the public service, the estimates for which I have directed to be laid before you. While I regret the necessity of large additional burdens on my subjects, it is a just consolation and satisfaction to me to observe the state of our credit, commerce, and resources, which is the natural result of the continued exertions of industry, under the protection of a free and well-regulated government.

My lords and gentlemen,

A just sense of the blessings now so long enjoyed by this country will, I am persuaded, encourage you to make every effort which can enable you to transmit those blessings unimpaired to your posterity. I entertain a confident hope, that under

*the protection of Providence, and with constancy and perseverance on our part, the principles of social order, morality, and religion, will ultimately be successful, and that my faithful people will find their present exertions and sacrifices rewarded by the secure and permanent enjoyment of tranquillity at home, and by the deliverance of Europe from the greatest danger with which it has been threatened since the establishment of civilized society.*

The address was moved by Sir Francis Knatchbull, and seconded by Mr. Canning. Mr. Wilberforce objected to it, as pledging the house to carry on the war till a counter revolution was effected in France, and moved as an amendment,—  
“ To assure his Majesty that they are determined to grant the most liberal supplies for the purpose of enabling his Majesty to act with vigour and effect in supporting the dignity of his crown, the internal security of his dominions, and the good faith towards his Majesty's allies, for which this country had been so eminently distinguished; and that, notwithstanding the disappointments and reverses of the last campaign, they are firmly convinced that from the unremitting exertions of his Majesty, and the spirit and zeal which have been so generally manifested throughout the kingdom, by a people sensible of the advantages they enjoy under his Majesty's government, they may promise themselves (by the blessings of Providence) complete security from the attempts of foreign or domestic enemies. That at the same time they beg leave most humbly to represent to his Majesty, that upon full consideration of all the events and circumstances of the present war, and of some transactions which have lately passed in France, and also of the negotiation entered into by the states-general, they think it advisable and expedient to endeavour to restore the blessings of peace to his Majesty's subjects and to his allies, upon just and reasonable terms. But that if, contrary to the ardent wishes of his faithful commons, such endeavours on the part of his Majesty should be rendered ineffectual by the violence and ambition of the enemy, they are persuaded that the burdens and evils of a just and necessary war will be borne with cheerfulness by a loyal, affectionate, and united people.”

*A long debate ensued, at the close of which,*

Mr. Sheridan would not trouble the house at that late hour on the general topic of the debate. He had attempted twice to be heard, as he was very desirous of delivering his sentiments on the important question before the house, but the last time it had been judged most proper by the house, to prefer hearing the chancellor of the exchequer, on account of his indisposition. He would, therefore, at present only remark, that if Lord Chatham had been so very able a minister, it was highly improper to remove him; but he thought it a public misfortune that no inquiry was instituted into his conduct, which, he was convinced, would be proved to be very different from what Mr. Dundas had represented it; and, had he continued in office much longer, he had good grounds for believing a petition would have soon been presented to the king, from the commercial men in the city of Lon-



don, for his removal. Certain it was, his lordship had felt the necessity of his retreat, as on a late meeting, where it was proposed whether he should be invited or not, on a division he could obtain but a single affirmation.

*The house divided—for the amendment 75 ; against it 204.*

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JANUARY 2, 1795.

REPEAL OF THE BILL FOR SUSPENDING THE HABEAS CORPUS  
ACT.

MR. SHERIDAN said, he should take the earliest opportunity he could of submitting to that house a question, which was, whether the habeas corpus act, and all the advantages which the people of this country had derived under it, should or should not be restored ; and whether the respect and veneration with which we had been accustomed to regard the trial by jury, and the esteem and deference which had been generally given to verdicts, should be continued, or be entirely eradicated from the public mind ? He alluded to the bill for the suspension of the habeas corpus act which had passed last session, under an idea of a plot existing in this country, and of the decision of a jury that no such plot existed. He therefore gave notice that, on Monday next, he should move for leave to bring in a bill to repeal the act of the last session of parliament for the suspension of the habeas corpus act.

CITY MILITIA BILL.

Mr. Sheridan observed, perhaps the house was waiting for the minister. A question of great importance, respecting the navy of Great Britain, had been put, and no lord of the admiralty was present to answer it. He was in the same unpleasant situation ; for he had a matter of importance, and particularly interesting to the city of London, to bring forward, but he did not see any of the members for that city in their places ; perhaps, they too, like the lords of the admiralty, might think it beneath their dignity to attend to it. He now, however, gave notice, that on Monday he should have something to say relative to the city militia act.

LOAN.

*Mr. Fox wished to be informed when the subject of the loan was to be discussed. Mr. Rose said he was not able to afford the information, but he had no doubt the chancellor of the exchequer would be in the house on Monday and give it.*

Mr. Sheridan said, this was quite an unlucky day for information. A question had been put to the lords of the admiralty upon the state of the navy, and they had remained silent ; he had something to ask of the members for the city of London, but they were not present ; his right honourable friend wanted information upon the loan, the minister was absent, and the only answer was, "That there would be time between this and Monday for the chancellor of the exchequer to make up his mind upon the matter." The truth was, the minister did not pay any attention to the rules and forms of the house. When a question concerning a supply to be granted for carrying on the war, came on, the chancellor of the exchequer was absent : he would come at a future time to tell the house how he intended to dispose of the supply. Most unquestionably, in point of decency, the chancellor of the exchequer ought to be present ; but that was out of the question, for all the proceedings of granting supplies were such as he expected not to be debated, they were to be granted as of course, and no information was to be had on points to which such supplies related.

*Mr. Rose replied.*

Mr. Sheridan said, Mr. Rose had made the matter much worse by what he had said, for now he had accused the chancellor of the exchequer of never doing his duty on an occasion which, he still must think, peculiarly required his attendance. He could not agree with the hon. gentleman that this was a mere matter of course, for it certainly was possible that several members might think it improper to grant a supply at all, without inquiry previously made into the objects for which the supply was to be granted ; and his Majesty's ministers ought to attend for the purpose of giving satisfaction to any inquiries thought necessary to be made. He had been misunderstood as to what he had said on the forms of the house ; he had asserted, and still persisted in the assertion, that no reliance could be placed on the right hon. gentleman's observance of the forms of the house, because he was notorious for a breach of them ; and therefore, they could not have any great security that the forms of the house in this case would not be broken through, especially when they had already been violated by the unconstitutional measures of negotiating a loan before the sitting of parliament, and previous to a knowledge whether the supplies for which that loan was



made, would meet with the approbation of the house. They had an additional reason to fear in this case, when they remarked on the unusual manner in which parliament had been prorogued, not for the purpose of negotiating a treaty, nor for the purpose of making peace, or to do any service to the country, but merely that the minister might be able to make his loan in this unconstitutional manner.

*Mr. Steele said this was not the proper time to consider whether the minister had acted properly or not in his making the loan, that would be best known when the loan came to be considered.*

Mr. Sheridan thought this was not an improper time to take into consideration the question of the loan; on the contrary, this was the very time he should choose to discuss it if the minister had been present. The house was reduced to a most extraordinary situation; there were among its members many opulent men—he hoped there always would be such men in the house. Now, it was a very reasonable supposition, that many of these persons were interested in the loan; it was, therefore, clear, they did not come fairly and freely to consider the subject, for they must of course be biassed, and would wish that the supplies voted should be sufficient to give them all the advantage they expected from their bargain. It was not a fact that parliament had ever considered it as a light matter to break through a bargain into which the minister had entered for a loan; the language held in that house had always been, that it was improper to break through a bargain without some weighty and important reason to justify it. As to the loan to the emperor, he said, he could not give credit to any of the reports circulated on that subject, because he did not believe, after the experience we had had of the faith of our allies, any man would come down to the house without a mask, and offer them so bold and barefaced an imposition. He did not conceive such effrontery was possible.

*Mr. Pitt having entered the house and replied to Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Fox and other members having also spoken,*

Mr. Sheridan rose again—he had heard many things asserted in the course of the debate, which he thought open to a ready answer from the meanest understanding, but having troubled the committee so often, he had remained silent. There had, however,

arisen a new circumstance—the answer given by the chancellor of the exchequer to the doubts of a worthy baronet (Sir William Milner), had caused a discussion of the utmost importance. Nothing could be of more importance than to ascertain, from the mouth of the minister, an explicit declaration of the real causes and objects of the war. His right hon. friend (Mr. Fox) had said he understood him on this subject. Conscious of the superior quickness of intellect which his right hon. friend possessed, he had no doubt but his right hon. friend had comprehended his meaning; but for himself he must plainly say, that, after constantly watching the minister on this subject, he had uniformly found him giving an apparently plain opinion, and then, when pressed for a little explanation, clothing that opinion in such a multiplicity of words that, in proportion as he professed himself to be intelligible, he had found him utterly obscure. The point now to be ascertained was—what was the prospect of the minister's present deliberation as to the object of the war? Mr. Sheridan quoted all Mr. Pitt's different declarations and explanations on this subject, which he showed went to establish these points:—first, that no treaty could be had with the present government of France—then, that no negotiation could be entered into with them till a government of our choice was imposed upon them—or until we were justified in treating with them, by being wholly subdued and completely at their mercy. In short, he would put Mr. Pitt's declarations, which had been detailed in many sentences, in a very few words—the present ministers would give peace to England whenever we should conquer France, or whenever France should conquer us—it was a declaration of insanity; and if the house of commons or the country supported him after this declaration, they must be as mad as the maniac that deluded them.

*A resolution "That a supply be granted to his Majesty" was put and carried, and the report ordered to be received on the following day.*

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JANUARY 5.

CITY MILITIA BILL.

MR. SHERIDAN observed that this bill was hurried through the house with unexampled and indecent precipitancy, and when he opposed it, as an infringement of the chartered rights of the citizens of London, he was told he was interfering in a matter



for which the citizens of London would not be obliged to him, for they had considered the principle of the bill and approved of it. The fact, however, was the reverse; the citizens had not then an opportunity of understanding the bill completely, and what they did understand of it they highly disapproved of. It was not his view to catch at temporary popularity, by affecting to feel for the rights of persons for whom he had no real concern; the truth was, he considered the bill in question as a gross violation of the rights of a very respectable body of men, whom it was the common duty of all the members of that house to esteem and respect: but to show he had no desire of thrusting himself forward in this business, he would decline it altogether if he should find the members for the city were disposed to do their duty to their constituents upon this subject. What he wished to know at this moment was, whether it was the intention of these hon. gentlemen to bring forward a motion for the repeal of the city militia bill, or to propose some regulation of it? He desired an answer to that question.

*Mr. Alderman Curtis said, that a committee had been appointed in the city to examine into this subject, and they had not yet made their report, and therefore he could not give all the information he could wish; but with regard to the principle of the bill, he would venture to say, that it was approved of by a large majority of the citizens of London. This he collected from the meetings which had taken place upon this subject.*

*Mr. Alderman Anderson said, that many attempts had been made to impose on the understandings of the citizens of London upon this subject, but they would not swallow the poison, however palatable the dose was made up; the majority of the citizens were decidedly in favour of the bill. He observed that Mr. Sheridan had said the members for London were not present on Friday. Mr. Anderson said he was in the house at a quarter of an hour after four o'clock, and he begged leave to say, he attended the house, he believed, as frequently as any member did, and he trusted that none of these reflections would be thrown out again. He understood the hon. gentleman had said, in the hearing of some persons, that he should have some observations to make to-day, if the members for the city should attend their duty.*

Mr. Sheridan said he did not wish to dispute with the hon. member whether or not the avocations which he had to fill were, or were not, of a nature superior to the attendance of his duty in parliament. He did not, he said, make a merit of his own attendance, as he conceived every man who aspired to a seat in that house, must at least know that attendance was a part of his duty. With regard to his having promised to make some observations

upon this subject to-day, in the hearing of anybody in that house, he certainly did not make that promise in the hearing of anybody, for he did not make it at all. As to the popularity of the bill, the gentleman who had asserted that would do well to revise that opinion; he insisted the bill was disrelished, a proof of which was they had suspended it, and not acted upon it, and in the populous ward of Farringdon they had bound their common council to endeavour by all means to get it repealed.

REPEAL OF THE BILL FOR SUSPENDING THE HABEAS CORPUS  
ACT.

Mr. Sheridan said, that in addressing the house upon a subject of the most important consideration, he by no means wished to mix his own opinions with what he should lay before them, but simply to bring forward what was the real state of facts. He was perfectly well aware that, in the present calamitous situation of the country, it might have been expected that he should direct attention to the war rather than to any other topic; and, to bring forward another subject might appear to have a tendency to divert their attention from that which was the principal object of discussion. He was also aware that there was something risked by the motion which he was now to submit to the house, as it probably would not meet with the concurrence of all those who, on the first night of the session, had expressed their disapprobation of the war, and now, while an appearance of strength was gathering to the party in opposition of the present war, the effect might be to produce a degree of public discouragement, and to diminish the hopes which were entertained of bringing it to a speedy conclusion. But there were some questions of essential and deep importance which no ground of expedience, no consideration of a nature merely temporary, should induce him to forego. Such was the question which he should bring forward to-night. The opposers of the war, who had encountered so much unpopularity at its onset, would stand on the same ground on the present occasion, in supporting the principles which they had uniformly avowed, whatever they might hazard by the discussion, with respect to the appearance of the strength of their party. Those who had joined them in the opposition to war, would consider how far it was incumbent upon them to support the same principles. But he should affirm that the present was the very



question which those who wished for peace were bound to support. The first consideration which had been held out by the chancellor of the exchequer with respect to the necessity of the war, was the internal situation of the country. A view of that situation was certainly in every respect the most important. Whether we now looked to the continuance of the war, or to the event of peace, it was of consequence to ascertain whether the subjects of this country were actuated by a loyal attachment to the king and an unshaken zeal for the constitution, or were under the influence of opposite sentiments. The right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had asked, if we should make peace, what would be the consequence of the inundation of French principles into this country? He, for one, did not dread the consequence. But, the right hon. gentleman had rightly taken his ground, if he supposed the people of England actuated by seditious and treasonable sentiments, and ready on the first opportunity to sacrifice all the blessings which they enjoyed from the admirable form of their constitution, and madly to destroy themselves. This was the point on which he was prepared to meet him. The question was not whether the habeas corpus should remain suspended till February, though an hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) had thought proper to declare, by anticipation, that in the present situation of things he should be of opinion, that the suspension ought to be renewed; if he (Mr. Sheridan) thought that there remained no ground for suspending it, no consideration of the shortness of time would induce him to withdraw his motion; he would say with the father of the right hon. gentleman (the Earl of Chatham), who, when he was asked whether he would submit to a tyranny of forty days, answered—"No; he would not consent that the people of England should be fettered and shackled even for an hour:" but the question now was—whether the habeas corpus should remain suspended for ever? Another consideration connected with this motion was, whether the reverence and respect for the decision of juries, so intimately interwoven with the principles of the British constitution, and hitherto so sacredly observed, should or should not be eradicated from the minds of the people of England? In conducting the present discussion, he should argue from circumstances as they really existed. He would appeal to the gentlemen on the other side with respect to the situation in which this country was now placed, and

ask them, whether they would not accept of the compromise that the sentiments, numbers, and force of the societies, who had been held up as dangerous to the constitution, should remain exactly as they were at present? But there was no situation of things in which those gentlemen were not provided with an answer. If it was urged that the designs of those societies had been checked, they would ask, whether they ought to withdraw the security at the moment they had succeeded in repelling the danger? If the influence of the societies was said to be increased, they would contend that the force which it had been found necessary to oppose to an inferior danger, became still more indispensable when the danger was increased. If they were called upon in a time of war, they would allege, that was not the proper time to judge of the degree of power to be granted to the executive government; if, during the interval of peace, they would enlarge upon the necessity of guarding against the consequences of an intercourse with the daring republicans of France, there was no situation in which they would not be provided with some argument for suspending this chief bulwark of the rights and liberties of Englishmen. The suspension would be justified, not merely as a guard against the crime of treason, but, according to the new phrase, against any disposition to moral guilt which might be productive of dangers. On such pretences would the suspicion be justified, and the act itself never again restored? He would remind gentlemen of the grounds on which the suspension had been voted: the preamble of the act stated, that—"Whereas a traitorous and detestable conspiracy has been formed for subverting the existing laws and constitution, and for introducing the system of anarchy and confusion which has so fatally prevailed in France," &c.

He now came to facts. Did this traitorous, detestable conspiracy exist, if, indeed, it had ever existed at all? It would be necessary to prove not only that it once existed, but that the same danger still continued. Were they prepared to go to the length of these assertions? He would not shrink from what he had said on a former occasion, that he considered ministers as the sole fabricators of these plots. What he had then declared from strong surmise and deep suspicion, he was now enabled to repeat from the evidence of facts. He had, at his back, the verdicts of repeated juries, who had negatived the existence of



any such plot. But the opinion of juries had been lately treated in such a manner, that he was almost afraid to quote their authority; but he would remind a learned gentleman (Sir John Mitford) that for language much less unconstitutional than he had employed, with respect to the verdicts of these juries, a learned sergeant had formerly been committed to prison by the house of commons. That learned gentleman had told them, that the acquittal of a jury did not declare the man innocent, it only exempted him from being tried again upon the same charge. He had always understood, that it was a maxim of the law of England, that every man was presumed to be innocent till he was found guilty. But so far from this being the case, he was now told, that not even the acquittal of a jury established his innocence, or restored him to his former place in society. Much stress was laid upon the decision of a grand jury. He did not rest much upon that, more especially as he understood that some degree of management had been employed in forming that grand jury. Letters were sent round, one of which he now held in his hand, dispensing with the attendance of some who might otherwise have sat on that grand jury; and so far as that went, had the effect of packing them. But he could not certainly regard the authority of any grand jury as of much weight, if, after the prisoner was put upon his trial, by their finding a bill against him, he was still, by the liberal spirit of the law of England, to be considered innocent till he was found guilty by a verdict of his peers. An hon. gentleman (Mr. Wyndham) had gone even farther than the learned character to whom he had alluded; he had thrown down the gauntlet to his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox).—How far it was prudent or proper in that gentleman so to do, he would not take upon him to determine, especially when he recollected that, on a former occasion, he had declared that he would not give up the title of his friend till his right hon. friend had first give him a hint for that purpose. The neighbourhood into which the hon. gentleman had lately got had, perhaps, impaired his memory. He had not waited for the hint; he had now renounced the title. Nor was such a hint to be expected from his right hon. friend by those who knew with what strength of attachment he clung to all those of whom he had been accustomed to think favourably, and how unwilling he was to give up any who had once formed claims upon his friendship.

Now, however, that the hon. gentleman had voluntarily disclaimed the connexion, he had no hesitation to declare that he should henceforth meet him on the ground of fair and avowed hostility. That hon. gentleman, next to another person, had been the principal instrument of bringing the country into the calamitous situation in which it was now placed. He trusted that he had abilities to extricate it from the difficulties of that situation. At any rate, he knew that he had boldness to wait the responsibility which would ultimately attach to all the authors of the present war. Except, indeed, there was something in the support of the war that corrupted and degraded the human heart, he should have thought that the hon. gentleman would have been the last of all men to apply to persons acquitted by juries of their country, the opprobrious epithet of acquitted felons. There might have been some ground for this epithet, if those persons had owed their escape to any flaw in the indictment, or to any deficiency of technical forms; it might then have been urged that they were not entitled by the verdict of a jury to a regeneration of character, and were still to be considered in the light in which the hon. gentleman had placed them, as men branded with guilt, and outcasts from society. He would not say that every man acquitted was therefore innocent; there could be no rule of that sort without an exception; a criminal might owe his acquittal to a flaw in the indictment or a failure of the evidence. It had been stated the other night that a person might be charged with murder who had only been guilty of house-breaking, and because he was not found guilty upon the first charge, was he therefore to be considered as a pure and honourable character? But did the men who had lately been acquitted stand in that situation? If there was any case in which the verdict of a jury went completely to establish the innocence of the party accused, it ought to be with respect to the charge of high treason. That charge, it was to be recollected, came with the highest authority, and with a degree of influence which it was difficult for any individual to resist. It was to be recollected too, that, with respect to the crime of high treason, the country itself was both party and judge, since he who conspires against the life of the king, conspires at the same time against the peace of the country.

With respect to the charge of levying war, it was possible



that the party accused might escape from the incompetency of the evidence; but with respect to the charge of compassing and imagining the king's death, the intention itself constituted the crime; and if the jury had in their own minds a conviction of the criminal intention, and there was sufficient proof of the overt act, they were bound to find their verdict guilty. Mr. Sheridan said, he would now put it whether, in the course of the late trials, anything that could have been brought forward against the prisoners was omitted, from any want of time or attention? He had heard, indeed, a gentleman (the solicitor-general) say, that the jury, if they had known all that he did, would have found their verdict differently. But he conceived that he must have been asleep at the time, otherwise it must be inferred that he had neglected to state to the jury all that he knew, and thereby shown himself disqualified for the place which he held—a confession which he surely would not wish to make to the gentlemen along with whom he sat, far less to those on the other side. He could not mean that anything farther had since come to his knowledge, since he had himself admitted that the effect of those acquittals went to prevent the parties from being again tried on the same charge. No pains had surely been spared to bring those persons to a conviction, if they had been really guilty. A report of that house was brought forward, containing almost everything that was afterwards brought out in evidence, and that was followed by the decision of the grand jury. Neither could it be contended, that there was any want of time; some of the persons tried were taken up in May; the six months previous to their trial were employed in collecting and arranging evidence; a task in which many respectable persons, urged by sense of what they had conceived to be their duty to their country, were induced to take an active part. Neither was there any deficiency of legal ability; twelve gentlemen of the greatest professional eminence, whose talents were adequate to any cause, were retained on the side of the crown, at an expense of upwards of £8,000, independently of the bill of the solicitor to the treasury. [Mr. Sheridan here read the list of the names of the counsel for the prosecution—the attorney-general, the solicitor-general, Mr. Austruther, Mr. Sergeant Adair, Mr. Bearcroft, Messrs. Bower, Law and Garrow, king's counsel; Mr. Wood, Mr. Baldwin, and Mr. Perceval.] The attorney-

general, continued he, assures me that he exerted his abilities gratuitously; an example which, I trust, will be imitated, and for which I give him credit, though I cannot approve of his doctrines of high treason—doctrines which, if they were once to be admitted, no man could, in my opinion, be safe; nor yet of the detestable evidence of spies, so much resorted to in the conduct of the prosecution. Such an array could only indeed have been encountered by the abilities and eloquence of my hon. friend (Mr. Erskine), who, by his conduct on that occasion, acquired the highest honour, but to whom all professional honour was become superfluous, and therefore he may deem it fortunate that he was associated with Mr. Gibbs, who deservedly comes in for a share of credit in the transaction. No exertion less vigorous, no abilities less splendid, would have been sufficient to withstand the weight of authority and of evidence with which it was attempted to crush and overwhelm the prisoners. But, perhaps, the gentlemen engaged in the prosecution will contend that they did not bring a sufficient number of witnesses; that they were willing to spare the trouble of persons engaged in different occupations, and residing in distant parts of the country. How far this is the case, said Mr. Sheridan, will appear by a paper from which I shall now read the list of the witnesses summoned in the case of Mr. Joyce, who was never tried. [Here Mr. Sheridan read an abstract of the list; it consisted of twenty-two persons from the secretary of state's office, and understrappers; forty-five jailors, justices, and constables; twenty-three people in prison; twenty-eight lawyers and lawyers' clerks; seventeen Scotchmen, who never saw Mr. Joyce; thirteen printers and booksellers; forty-nine common informers, &c., amounting in all, to two hundred and seven witnesses.]—There was one circumstance to be noticed; many of those men were kept in prison for a considerable time, till they were wanted for that purpose; there they were cooped up, half witnesses and half principals, till the day of trial; and yet, to the men who had been placed in this situation, many of whom had lost their business and been hurt in their character, not the smallest compensation had been given; he would not say, because they had failed in giving an evidence which might have been favourable to the views of the prosecution; some of them had been sent back to Sheffield with £3 to defray their expenses. With re-



gard to the manner in which the proceedings had been conducted, at least no labour had been spared. The first speech on the trials took up no less a space than nine hours. Had he been in the situation of a juryman, the very circumstance of an attorney-general taking nine hours to tell him of an overt act of high treason, would have been a reason why he should have given as his opinion, that he could not believe it, and that it could not possibly be true. The whole procedure on the part of the prosecution, was a piece of delicate clock-work, a sort of filigree net, too slight to hold a robust traitor, and yet so contrived as to let all the lesser cases of libel and sedition escape. The very intricacy and labour of the proceeding was, to his mind, the most satisfactory testimony that the case could not be supported on the grounds of substantial evidence and constitutional principles. If he was asked, did there not appear, from these trials, instances of sedition? he had no hesitation to say, that they exhibited instances of many gross and scandalous libels. He was ready to admit there were in the societies mischievous men, intent on mischievous purposes. There were others actuated by enthusiasm, whom he could not consider in the same light, because it was that sort of enthusiasm which had actuated men of the purest minds. As to the phrases "convention, &c.," in which they had effected an imitation and approbation of the proceedings of the French, the worst that could be said of them was, that they were contemptibly foolish.

He had attended the trials, he said, from a principle of duty. He was of opinion that every man who loved the constitution, and who thought that it was endangered by false alarms, would feel it incumbent, on such an occasion, to attend trials which he considered as originating from ministerial artifice; and to watch the conduct of the crown lawyers and of the judges, in order to avert those calamities from the country in which, at former times it had been involved, to prevent that most dreadful of all wars—a war of plots and conspiracies; wars in which the purest blood had been shed by the most destructive of all weapons, the perjured tongues of spies and informers. That there was no real danger appeared from the declaration of the Chief Justice Eyre, who, in summing up on one of the trials, stated that it was an ostentatious and boasting conspiracy, and that it was much in favour of the accused that they had neither men, money, nor zeal to

effect the purposes with which they were charged. On the first trial one pike was produced, that was afterwards withdrawn from mere shame. A formidable instrument was talked of to be employed against the cavalry; it appeared upon evidence to be a tee-totum in a window at Sheffield. There was a camp in a back shop, an arsenal provided with nine muskets, and an exchequer containing nine pounds and one bad shilling; all to be directed against the whole armed force and established government of Great Britain. Mr. Sheridan said that he, in the first instance, had shown the most obstinate incredulity with respect to all the rumours of a plot. He endeavoured to call to mind whether the present ministry had in any former instance availed themselves of a similar artifice. He recollected that in the year 1783, at the period when the coalition took place, they represented those who were engaged in that measure as setting up a fourth party in the state, as wishing to supersede the authority of the king and to destroy the constitution, and had actually persuaded many well-meaning people at the time to be of that opinion, and to regard the authors of the measure as enemies to their country, whose destruction was necessary for the preservation of the established government. He recollected too, that the very men who had set up the coalition were now in the cabinet, and that the charge brought against them must therefore have been false, and an instance of successful deception. He was more confirmed in his persuasion of the trick when he looked to the conduct of the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt), who had adopted the policy of keeping open the door of reform that he might get himself out by it, and whose system it had uniformly been, on that question, to do just as much as might nourish hope, and yet discourage effort. He recollected that the society of the Friends of the People had been constituted of a hundred persons, of whose characters it would not become him to speak, since he himself had the honour to be one of the number. That society had, at its first formation, been represented as more pernicious than any of the others; they had been held out both in that and in the other house, as men whose existence was incompatible with the safety of the constitution. Their first institution had been followed by a royal proclamation, in order to secure the country from the infection of their principles. In what light had that society been held out on the late trials? That very society had been represented as the saviours



of the country, as the standards of political orthodoxy, and it had been represented as the blackest aggravation of the guilt of other societies, that they had not suffered themselves to be guided by them; that they had not implicitly adopted their principles, or concurred in their proceedings. This he could not help regarding as the second instance of successful deception. The proclamation afterwards issued, previous to the calling out of the militia and the assembling of parliament, put into the mouth of his Majesty an expression which was not true, namely, that there existed insurrections in the country. It might be urged, that at that time there was great appearance of danger, and that it was better to prevent the meditated mischief than to wait for its arrival. In such a case ministers too would have done better to have taken the responsibility to themselves, and applied to parliament for a bill of indemnity. He had, on a former occasion, taken notice of all the arts which were at that time employed to propagate alarm; of the Duke of Richmond throwing himself into the Tower in the middle of the night; of the mail-coach being retarded, and carrying with it the most dismal reports of the state of the metropolis, so that every person who arrived in a post-chaise expected to find that all London was in a flame. He had then surmised that all this was the effect of mere political artifice; he now found his suspicion confirmed by facts. During the course of the trials he had heard the evidence of the spies of government, no part of which went to sanction the alarm which had been so industriously propagated. It followed, therefore, either that ministers were deceived by their own spies, and had thereby showed themselves unfit for the situation which they held, or that they had acted upon an alarm which they did not feel, to answer the infamous purposes of their own ambition, and to delude the people into a wicked and a ruinous war. At the time everybody admitted that the measures of ministry were extraordinary, but something they said must come out. Papers notoriously in the pay of ministers, even took upon them to mention the particulars of the plot, and to name the persons concerned. He had then moved for a committee of the house to inquire into the subject; his motion was negatived because ministers knew that no such plot had ever existed. If a government wanted a plot, plots, like other commodities, would be brought to the market. Had his motion been adopted when it was first proposed,

it would have then refuted the libel on the character of the people of England. The right hon. gentleman, in a more advanced stage of the business, had come forward with a motion for a secret committee. It did not become him to say that the members who composed that committee were not highly respectable, they were chosen by ballot, and therefore, no doubt, perfectly independent; but it was well known that every such election by ballot was determined by previous agreement; and he had himself previously read the names of thirteen or fourteen members who were to be in that committee, and he must say, that it was a circumstance of suspicion that they resorted to this mode of choosing a secret committee rather than that of naming the members over the table, as had been done on another important occasion. A report was presented to that committee, cut and dry, and by some of them he would venture to say, adopted without much examination. In speaking of the gentlemen who composed that committee he felt some degree of delicacy; they were not now all here; they were so much alarmed that they did not consider that house as a place of sufficient security, and had taken refuge in the upper house. A coronet, the reward of their seasonable apprehensions, would, they thought, be most likely to secure the head of the owner from future danger. While the committee were sitting upon this report, which had been in preparation five or six months, two notes were sent, one to his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox), and another to him, informing them that something important was to take place in the house of commons. This was all the intimation which was thought necessary to precede a suspension of the chief bulwark of the rights and liberties of Englishmen. Upon hearing only a moiety of the report from the minister, the suspension of the habeas corpus act was proposed. Seventeen divisions had on that occasion taken place on his side of the house; and he should ever regard the share which he had taken in that measure as the most meritorious part of his parliamentary conduct. In the house of lords the business was not conducted so hastily; their lordships were presented with pikes, with drawings, with male and female screws; their noble natures were not so easily to be roused; it was necessary that they should be presented with with some ocular demonstration of the danger:—

*“Segnius irritant animos dimissa per aurem,  
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.”*



He was almost ashamed to say, that the suspension of the habeas corpus act was not a matter of slight or trivial consideration. He here quoted the opinion of Sir Edward Coke on the importance of the habeas corpus, which concludes "that without the enjoyment of this privilege we are no longer anything more than bondsmen. There remains no distinction between the freeman and the slave—the living and the dead." He then proceeded to quote the more recent opinions of Judge Blackstone, in the following extract from his chapter on the rights of persons: section II:—

"Of great importance to the public is the preservation of this personal liberty, for if once it were left in the power of any of the highest magistrates to imprison arbitrarily whomever he or his officers thought proper (as in France it is daily practised by the crown), there would soon be an end of all other rights and immunities. Some have thought that unjust attacks, even upon life or property, at the arbitrary will of the magistrate, are less dangerous to the commonwealth than such as are made upon the personal liberty of the subject. To bereave a man of life, or by violence to confiscate his estate without accusation or trial, would be so gross and notorious an act of despotism, as must at once convey the alarm of tyranny throughout the whole kingdom; but confinement of the person, by secretly hurrying him to gaol, where his sufferings are unknown or forgotten, is a less striking and therefore a more dangerous engine of arbitrary government. And yet sometimes, when the state is in real danger, even this may be a necessary measure. But the happiness of our constitution is, that it is not left to the executive power to determine when the danger of the state is so great as to render this measure expedient; for it is the parliament only, or legislative power, that whenever it sees proper can authorize the crown, by suspending the *habeas corpus* act for a short and limited time, to imprison suspected persons without giving any reason for so doing, as the senate of Rome was wont to have recourse to a dictator, a magistrate of absolute authority, when they judged the republic in any imminent danger. The decree of the senate, which usually preceded the nomination of this magistrate, *dent operam consules, ne quid respublica detrimenti capiat*, was called the *senatus consultum ultimæ necessitatis*. In like manner this experiment ought only to be tried in cases of extreme emergency; and in these the nation parts with its liberty for a while in order to preserve it for ever."

If the position of this famous lawyer be true, if a suspension of the habeas corpus can be compared to nothing but a measure which suspends the whole of the constitution, it ought surely only to take place in cases of the most urgent and absolute necessity. He would ask whether the present was a case of such extreme emergency? If any man believed that the people of this country were infected with treasonable principles, and disposed to

overturn the government, he might then be justified in holding such an opinion ; but if any man believed that the characteristic feature of the English nation was a sober, settled, and steady attachment to the constitution, it was incumbent on him to call for an immediate repeal of the act suspending the habeas corpus. Such was the opinion which had been confirmed by repeated verdicts of a jury—verdicts which went completely to do away the idea of any conspiracy having ever existed in the country. He, for one, would not wait till ministers should exercise their ingenuity in the fabrication of new plots, or should have time to propagate fresh alarms ; he would call upon them immediately to restore to the people those rights, without which they could neither respect themselves nor the government under which they lived.

I feel myself, said Mr. Sheridan, as if contending for a melancholy truth with ministers, when I assure them that such is the state of the country, and such is the loyalty of the people, that they are firmly attached to the constitution, and disposed quietly to enjoy its blessings, without any idea of either attending the person of his Majesty, or cutting the throats of one another. I shall hear then not of a plot, but of the existence of a propensity to moral guilt, as justifying a continuance of the suspension of the habeas corpus. I will not say that there have been no instances of sedition, but I will affirm even that the evidence of these appears in so questionable a shape as ought to excite your suspicion. It is supported by a system of spies and informers, a system which has been carried to a greater extent under the present administration than in any former period of the history of the country. I will not say that there is no government in Europe which does not stand in need of the assistance of spies, but I will affirm that the government which avails itself of such support does not exist for the happiness of the people. It is a system which is calculated to engender suspicion and to beget hostility ; it not only destroys all confidence between man and man, but between the governors and the governed ; where it does not find sedition it creates it. It resembles in its operations the conduct of the father of all spies and informers, the devil, who introduced himself into Paradise, not only to inform his own pandemonium of the state of that region, but to deceive and betray the inhabitants. The spy, in order to avoid suspicion, is obliged



to assume an appearance of zeal and activity ; he is the first to disseminate the doctrines of sedition, or to countenance the designs of violence ; he deludes the weak by the speciousness of his arguments, and inflames the turbulent by the fury of his zeal. It must have made a man's heart burn to hear the sort of evidence brought forward by these spies on the late trials. A wretch of the name of Lynam said that, in his capacity of delegate to one of the societies, he had incurred suspicion, had been tried by the other delegates and honourably acquitted. The counsel for the prosecution could hear such a declaration with unblushing countenances. By what means had he been acquitted, but by pretences of superior zeal and more furious exertion ? I wish the hon. gentleman who called the persons who had been tried acquitted felons, had been present when such witnesses were examined against them ; I wish he had been present when the chief baron (Macdonald) addressed Mr. Thelwall, not as an acquitted felon, but as having obtained a verdict which was honourable to his character, and exhorted him in a tone of the utmost gentleness to employ his talents in future for purposes useful to his country. The manner in which that address was made, was fit and becoming the character of the judge by whom it was delivered, as well as respectful to the person to whom it was directed. Of whatever indiscretion the persons who had been tried had been guilty, it will not be disputed by those who have attended to their case, that they have feeling hearts, that they are alive to every sense of indignity, and that they must have been deeply wounded by the opprobrious epithet applied to them by the hon. gentleman. I trust this is sufficient to induce him to make the only reparation now in his power, by the speediest recantation of his hasty and ill-judged expression. There was another witness of the name of Taylor, not an acquitted but a convicted felon, who had been tried for a crime into the moral demerit of which I will not enter, but which had been attended with the aggravation of perjury, but sentenced only to a slight punishment, on account, as was alleged, of some favourable circumstances in his case, though, upon my word, I could find none, except that he had assisted to hang his brother spy (Watts), yet this man was thought a proper character to be brought forward as an evidence into a court of justice, and allowed to hunt after the blood of Englishmen. If ministry had been duped and deluded by their spies, ought

they not to admit the deception that had been played upon them? But, said Mr. Sheridan, I can suppose the case of a haughty and stiff-necked minister who never mixed in a popular assembly, who had therefore no common feeling with the mass of the people, no knowledge of the mode in which their intercourse is conducted, who was not a month in the ranks in this house before he was raised to the first situation, and, though on a footing of equality with any other member, elevated with the idea of fancied superiority, such a minister can have no communication with the people of England, except through the medium of spies and informers; he is unacquainted with the mode in which their sentiments are expressed, and cannot make allowance for the language of toasts and resolutions adopted in an unguarded and convivial hour. Such a minister, if he lose their confidence, will bribe their hate; if he disgust them by arbitrary measures, he will not leave them till they are completely bound and shackled; above all, he will gratify the vindictive resentment of apostacy by prosecuting all those who dare to espouse the cause which he has betrayed, and he will not desist from the gratification of his malignant propensities and the prosecution of his arbitrary schemes, till he has buried in one grave the peace, the happiness, the glory and the independence of England. Such a minister must be disqualified to judge of the real state of the country, and must be eternally the dupe of those vile spies whose interest it is to deceive him as well as to betray others. In what country, or from what quarter of the community, are we to apprehend the effects of those principles of insubordination with which we have been so often threatened? The characteristic feature of the English nation is entirely different; they testify on every occasion the utmost respect for superiority (I am sorry to use the phrase) wherever the advantages of rank or fortune are exercised by those who enjoy them with any tolerable decency or regard to the welfare of their dependents. What nobleman or gentleman finds in his tenants or servants, so long as he treats them with propriety and kindness, a hostile and envious disposition? What merchant or great manufacturer finds in those whom he employs, so long as he treats them well, a sullen and uncomplying temper, instead of a prompt and cheerful obedience? This tendency to insubordination forms no part of the temper or character of the people; the contrary disposition is even carried to an extreme. If I am



asked whether there is any danger in the present moment, I say yes. But it is not a danger of that sort which is to be remedied by suspending the rights, or abridging the privileges of the people. The danger arises from a contempt being produced among the lower orders of all public men and all public principles.

A circumstance occurs to me which took place during the late trials, where the Friends of the People were praised from the bench. When one of the Sheffield witnesses (Broomhead) was asked why his society declined communicating with the Friends of the People? he answered that he would tell them very plainly, that they did not believe them to be honest; that there were several of them members of parliament; that they had some of them been in place; and that they conceived the ins and the outs, however they might vary in their profession, to be actuated by the same motives of interest. I, who might be as little implicated in such a charge as any man, felt rebuked and subdued by the answer. What is it that tends to produce this contempt of public men? The conduct of those who ought to hold out an example of public principle. I heard an hon. gentleman (Mr. Wyndham) the other day—and on this subject I will pursue him with professed and unabating hostility—complain of the indifference and languor of the country in the present contest, and call upon them to greater displays of vigour and exertion, while at the same time he affirmed, that no man in the country felt any distress from the pressure and calamities of war. Will he say this to the starving manufacturers of Norwich? Will he say it to the slaving poor of the metropolis, obliged to purchase a loaf at ninepence, and unable to supply themselves with coals at this inclement season, from the enormous price of that necessary article? Will he say it to the landholders, whose property, since the commencement of the war, has been reduced half its value? What can this language of the hon. gentleman mean, except he means to drive the great body of the people to desperation? When I heard the hon. gentleman call upon the country for increased exertions, I concluded that he would have proposed to throw in his salary to the aid of the public fund, and to live contented on his own splendid income. I supposed he would have persuaded his right hon. friend (Mr. Pitt) to relinquish the revenue which he derives from the Cinque Ports, and to live

on the £6000 a year attached to his other appointments; that he would have persuaded another hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) to give up one of his numerous salaries; and a noble marquis, in another house, to give up some of the emolument which he derives from the tellership of the exchequer, which would this year amount to £15,000. As the noble marquis, on a former occasion, professed himself ready to abandon part of those emoluments, and take the office at a more moderate salary, he had now an excellent opportunity to prove the sincerity of his declaration. I expected all this, and that they would not have failed to assist their own arguments by the operation of their generosity. The hon. gentleman shakes his head, as if I had said something which I did not mean, or would not stand by. When formerly, in conjunction with him and others, I attacked the corruption of ministers, I thought I was speaking the sentiments of men who were sincere in recommending the doctrine of public economy, and not persons secretly bargaining for a share of the wages of corruption. Little did I think that the opposition which they then expressed, was only an envious admiration of the honours and emoluments of ministers, and an impatient desire of participation; little did I conceive that the first act of a noble person (Duke of Portland) would have been to arrest from a gallant man a token of honour, which he had merited by his public services; a man, to whom, indeed, that token could add no honour, but who might wish to introduce into his own profession such a badge of distinction. In Ireland, ever since the period of their arrangement, they have experienced the utmost difficulty and embarrassment, from a dispute which has subsisted about patronage, and which has at last been compromised; how far honourably, I will leave to those who are best acquainted with the transactions to determine. In the present war, ministers have been obliged to have recourse to allies both at home and abroad; both have been procured by the same means, bargain and subsidy. Among the members of the present cabinet there subsists a sort of Dutch amity, and they hate one another more cordially than even they do us who are in opposition to their measures. The question is, has the Duke of Portland a majority in the cabinet? No; Mr. Pitt constrains him by an additional vote. It was curious to observe the changes which had lately taken place; from a lord privy seal, to be first lord of the admiralty, and



*vice versa* ; from president of the council, to be lord-lieutenant of Ireland ; and from the lord-lieutenant of Ireland, to be master of the horse. A noble earl (Mansfield) came at first into the cabinet without any emolument ; I was at first disposed to give him credit for his disinterestedness ; but whether it was conceived by his colleagues to be a foolish thing, or that it might operate as a bad example, he was soon induced to accept the situation of president of the council, with a large salary. While all Europe is in a flame, they seem to be engaged at boy's play ; to be scrambling for places and pensions, for ribands and titles, and amusing themselves with puss in the corner in the cabinet room. When such is the picture of the conduct of public men, I am not surprised at the declaration of the witness from Sheffield, that he gives no man of that description credit for being honest. Willingly would I throw a veil over such transactions for the sake of the country, were it possible either to conceal their existence, or to extenuate their disgrace. Mr. Sheridan said that he now stated almost all that he had to say : there was nothing, in his mind, which would be more calculated to remove the danger of sedition than to abandon the system of corruption which now prevailed. To reform the conduct of government, and to correct abuses, would be the surest way to remedy discontent and render a farther suspension of the habeas corpus unnecessary. He proceeded to state that many of the acts of the societies, which had excited so much alarm, were only imitations of what had been done by the societies in 1780. If the minister at that time had been disposed to prosecute, he might have made out a much better case of treason than had been brought forward by the present ministers. Was the memorable expression of the illustrious Earl of Chatham forgotten, " that he rejoiced that America had resisted ? " Could none of the members recollect the strong language adopted by Mr. Burke on the same occasion, and the sentiments that had been avowed in the house by the opposers of that war, " that they wept over the fall of Montgomery, and did not exult in the desertion of Arnold ? " He produced a paper with the inscription, " Lenox, the friend to equality," which, had the then ministers been disposed to prosecute, contained matter more inflammatory than any paper that had been brought forward on the late trials. If approbation of the progress of the enemy, implied by toasts and resolutions ;

if an unqualified claim of universal representations; if disrespectful expressions, such as—"What care I for the king's birth-day?"—were to be construed as treasonable matter, all these would be found to apply to the associations in 1780, in a greater degree than to the present societies. Nay, a convention of the same nature with that, which these societies had been charged as having conspired to hold, was then actually held. These men only trod in the same path in which they had seen others go before them, not only without impeachment but without reproach. If, says Mr. Sheridan, we make a boast of equal laws, if these men are to be considered as guilty of high treason, let us have some retrospective hanging, and whatever in that case may happen to me, his Majesty will at least derive some benefit, since he will thereby get rid of a majority of his present cabinet. Mr. Sheridan said, that when he recollected that his speaking and writing might have been instrumental in inducing those men to espouse the views which they had adopted, he could not separate his own cause from theirs, and he did not know what other men's consciences were made of, who could prosecute, and even bring to condign punishment and infamy, persons who had been guilty of no other crime, than having taken up the same side of the question of which they themselves had formerly been the advocates and supporters. He then reprobated the arguments drawn from the differences of times, and the necessity of terrible examples, an argument to be found in every body's mouth, and which he contended to be false and mischievous. It was re-echoed from every quarter, and by every description of persons in office, from the prime minister to the exciseman—"Look to the example of France." The implication was a libel upon the character of Great Britain. The characters of nations arose not from the difference of soil and climate, but from the invariable and eternal decrees of Providence. Government was the school and seminary of the soul.

He proceeded to press the distinction in the characters and minds of the mass of the inhabitants of different countries, according to their different governments. "I will not, therefore," said Mr. Sheridan, "admit the inference or the argument, that because a people, bred under a proud, insolent, and grinding despotism, maddened by the recollection of former injuries, and made savage by the observation of former cruelties; a people, in



whose minds no sincere respect for property or law ever could have existed, because property had never been secured to them, and law had never protected them ; a people separated and divided into classes by the strongest and harshest lines of distinction, generating envy and smothered malice in the lower ranks, and pride and insolence in the higher : that the actions of such a people at any time, much less in the hour of frenzy and of fury, provoked and goaded by the arms and menaces of the surrounding despots that assailed them, should furnish an inference or ground on which to estimate the temper, character, or feelings of the people of Great Britain ; of a people, who, though sensible of many abuses which disfigure the constitution, were yet not insensible to its many and invaluable blessings ; a people, who revered the laws of their country because those laws shielded and protected all alike ; a people among whom all that was advantageous in private acquisition, all that was honourable in public ambition, was equally open to the efforts, the industry, and the abilities of all ; among whom progress and rise in society and public estimation, was one ascending slope, as it were, without a break or landing place, among whom no sullen line of demarcation separated and cut off the several orders from each other, but all was one blended tint, from the deepest shade that veiled the meanest occupation of laborious industry, to the brightest hue that glittered in the luxurious pageantry of title, wealth, and power : he would not, therefore, look to the example of France, for between the feelings, the tempers, and social disposition towards each other, much less towards the governments which they obeyed, of nations so differently constituted, and of such different habits, he would assert, that no comparison could be made which reason and philosophy ought not to spurn at with contempt and indignation." If pressed farther for an illustration on this subject, he would ask what answer would those gentlemen give, if a person affectedly or sincerely anxious for the preservation of British liberty were to say, " Britons, abridge the power of your monarch, restrain the exercise of his just prerogative, withhold all power and resources from his government, or even send him to his electorate from whence your voice exalted him—for mark what has been doing on the continent !—*Look to the example of kings!*—Kings, believe me, are the same in nature and temper everywhere ; trust yours no longer :—see how

that shameless and perfidious despot of Prussia, that trickster and tyrant, has violated every principle of truth, honour and humanity, in his murderous, though impotent, attempt at plunder and robbery in Poland! He, who had encouraged and even guaranteed to them their constitution:—see him, with a scandalous profanation of the resources which he had wrung by fraud from the credulity of Great Britain, trampling on the independence he was pledged to maintain, and seizing for himself the countries he had sworn to protect. Mark the still more sanguinary efforts of the despot of Russia, faithless not to us only and the cause of Europe, as it is called, but craftily outwitting her perjured coadjutor, profiting by his disgrace, and grasping to herself the victim which had been destined to glut their joint rapacity. See her thanking her favourite General Suwarrow, and, still more impious, thanking heaven for the opportunity; thanking him for the most iniquitous act of cruelty the bloody page of history recorded—the murderous scene at Prague, where, not in the heat and fury of action, not in the first impatience of revenge, but after a cold, deliberate pause of ten hours, with temperate barbarity, he ordered a considerate, methodical massacre of 10,000 women and children.—These are the actions of monarchs—*Look to the example of kings!*” What those gentlemen would reply to such an argument or exhortation I know not. My answer should be, I treat your inference and comparison with the same abhorrence and indignation with which I turn from those who would libel and traduce the character and principles of the people of England; and, upon the same grounds and principles, I will not look to the example of the princes you point out, and justly, perhaps, stigmatize, in order to measure my allegiance and opinion of the King of Great Britain. I am not to be misled by names; I regard not that the four letters are the same which form the title of the despot of Brandenburg, and of the first magistrate of this free country. I will not look to the principles or practice of a man born and bred in flattery, falsehood, and faithlessness—of a prince accustomed to look to fear only for obedience, and to arms only for security; of one used to consider his people as his property, their lives and limbs his traffic; of one instructed to make his will the law, and the law his tool; of one, finally, whose heart must be perverted and corrupted by that which ever did and ever will deprave and corrupt the hu-



man heart—the possession of despotic power. I will not borrow from such an example a rule to estimate the principles, acts, or wishes of a monarch, where it must be as palpably his wish as his interest to reign in the hearts of his people ; of a prince, whom a love of liberty alone in the people exalted to his present situation, and who must, therefore, regard and cherish that love of liberty in his subjects, as the real body-guard of his person ; of a king, who, not seated on a solitary eminence of power, sees in the co-existing branches of the legislature his equals—in the law his superior ; who, taught by the awful examples of our history, knows he is accountable for the sacred trust reposed in him, and, owing his title to the people's choice, feels the true security of his throne to be the people's love. Thus would I reply, and thus would I remain—though disclaiming the servile cant of adulation, with sentiments of unabated attachment to the person of our present monarch, and with unshaken adherence to the principle of hereditary government in this country, while limited, and directed to the objects for which that and all other power on earth is created—the benefit and happiness of the people who confer the trust.

Mr. Sheridan concluded that, if he were to look to the prodigality, the corruption, the detestable system of spies and informers, the insolence of the higher and the oppression of the lower orders, which had distinguished the old government of France, and which, he contended, had produced all the evils of the present system, he would thence be taught to avoid introducing into this country a system of terror and corruption, and to give back to the people those rights and privileges which riveted their affection and secured their obedience, and placed the order and stability of the government upon their best foundation, the protection and happiness of the subject. The object of his present motion went only to bring back that which ought never to have been taken away. He should, therefore, now move for leave to bring in a bill to repeal an act passed in the last session of parliament, empowering his Majesty to secure and detain such persons as shall be suspected of conspiring against his person and government.

*After a long debate,*

Mr. Sheridan rose in reply ; he had no occasion, he said, to avail himself of the usual indulgence of the house, in replying to

the arguments advanced by the other side of the house, for that night they had not brought one forward. They showed themselves afraid to grapple with the main question; no attempt had been made to prove that a sufficient cause had existed for the original suspension, which he did not think even justified by the fears of Mr. Wilberforce, lest he should be supposed to have become a friend of the liberties of Englishmen. The reason of his troubling the house at that late hour was, solemnly to ask Mr. Pitt what would be the state of the country which he might think would give the act to us again? he wished to know the possible case which would restore to British freemen the most glorious bulwark of their freedom. He wished to know if the suspension was to be renewed when the present act expired? was it again to be hurried through the house in one day? Was it to stand on the old plot, or was a new plot to be made, or was the habeas corpus to be again suspended without any plot at all? He thought ministers ought to declare whether they intended the renewal, or what were the grounds upon which they intended to continue the suspension of the act.

*The house divided—for the motion 41; against it 185.*

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JANUARY 7.

SUPPLY.—AUGMENTATION OF THE NAVY.

*A motion was made by Admiral Gardner for an augmentation in the number of seamen and marines. The service of the navy would this year require a proportion of 85,000 of the former, and 15,000 of the latter. A remarkable discussion took place on this occasion upon the construction of English ships of war. Mr. Robinson asserted their inferiority to the French in the circumstance of quick sailing. Captain Berkeley admitted they were better built, but denied their sailing faster; the French models he acknowledged to be superior to the English, but these had the superiority in workmanship. Admiral Gardner, however, allowed the quick sailing of the French, and ascribed their superior construction to the premiums given by their government for the best models, which were regularly submitted to the examination and decision of the Academy of Sciences. But the vessels lately taken from them have been of considerable service in the improvement of our own.*

MR. SHERIDAN said he certainly agreed with the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) who spoke last, that there was hardly any difference of opinion in the committee as to the propriety of supporting our naval superiority, but it was from an apprehension that no substantial good would arise to the country from



what had been said to-night, unless ministers were spurred on, that he should trouble the committee on this subject. He was the more of that opinion, when he observed the manner in which the right hon. gentleman conveyed his sentiments to-night. He had said that one of the reasons for the superiority of the enemy in the construction of their ships, arose from the contempt in which projectors were held in this country ; if that was the case, he was afraid the matter would be neglected ; for the right hon. gentleman, at the time he admitted the superiority of the enemy in one respect, and the defectiveness of the construction of our ships, conveyed an idea that he thought our ships altogether as good as they need be, and this when he knew it was not the opinion of the best naval officers of this country. He had observed that, if the gallant admiral were to meet one of the ships of the enemy, he would undertake to blow it out of the water. Mr. Sheridan had no doubt of the courage or the skill of that great naval officer ; on the contrary, he concurred heartily in the praise which had been so justly bestowed upon him ; but when he talked of blowing the enemy out of the water, there was one thing to be done first, namely, to catch them, which we were not very likely to do, while they could sail faster than us, and which it was now admitted they were able to do. Mr. Sheridan said he was very sorry to see any disposition to treat this matter lightly, and he wished he might hear of some measure being taken in consequence of what had passed to-day, although he confessed he had no very flattering hope of any great good being done. It had been said by an hon. member (Captain Berkeley) that single ships of the enemy sailed better than ours, but that they did not sail better in a body. He did not pretend to have much knowledge of sailing, but as a fleet could be formed but by a collection of single ships, he did not see how the distinction could be supported by reasoning. A great deal had been said as to the character of the first lord of the admiralty ; some had expressed indignation that any doubt should have been expressed of the adequate abilities of the noble lord ; others had said that he was an amiable character. To the first he would answer, that he cared for the indignation of no man, when he was doing what appeared to him to be his duty to the public, and speaking, perhaps, the voice of the public. To the second he would say, that it was not an amiable first lord of the admiralty we wanted ; but it was an at-

tentive, active, and vigilant first lord of the admiralty, and if this was the character of the noble lord, he had been most ungratefully treated by the public, and shamefully deserted by his colleagues, and in that supposition the best thing the house could do was to address his Majesty to dismiss from his councils those who had advised to turn out of so important an office a nobleman so well qualified to fill it, and to place in his stead another, who, whatever his talents may be, must have an apprenticeship to serve. He agreed with the right hon. gentleman who spoke last in one thing—that nothing was to be got by this war; that was what we all knew, and of which he needed not to have reminded us; but when he told the house the difficulties we had in manning our navy, and the credit he took to government for having succeeded, he ought also to have reminded the committee of another circumstance which tended to facilitate our manning the navy—he meant that of our having no privateers. With regard to the vote, Mr. Sheridan said he was so far from objecting to it on account of its being too large, that he thought it hardly large enough; and, in considering this, we were not to consider, as the right hon. gentleman had done, what force we had in former wars, but what was the strength of the enemy in this? and, upon that view, he was fearful the vote now proposed was too small; however, he should be ready to concur in any vote that might be necessary hereafter, in support of our navy, because he depended entirely on the navy this war. He hinted also that there might be some improvement in the marines. Having said this, he proceeded to observe that he had some reason to exult when he recollected what he had said at the time of his giving certain information to the house, and when he recollected how he had been answered by the right hon. gentleman on the other side. He had made an assertion with regard to the situation of Halifax last year that was flatly denied by the secretary of state. It turned out, however, that he (Mr. Sheridan) was right. He had read a paper, which he said was the speech of Lord Dorchester to the Indians of North America: the secretary of state called it a forgery, but it turned out to be authentic. He had alleged, the other night, that a company of merchants had agreed to invite his Majesty's ministers, but that Lord Chatham was expressly excluded; and the reason alleged for that mark of disrespect was, that he had not taken care to protect the trade and commerce of this country.



The chancellor of the exchequer seemed to dissent from that assertion. He wished the right hon. gentleman would inform the committee now, whether the assertion was true or false? These things he mentioned merely because he challenged inquiry into everything he said in that house.

Mr. Sheridan said, in answer to a question asked in the course of the conversation, that the mark of dissatisfaction with the conduct of the late first lord of the admiralty he alluded to, was, his not being invited to the dinner given by the American merchants to Mr. Jay, the minister-plenipotentiary from the United States.

*The report was ordered to be received on the following day.*

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JANUARY 15.

HABEAS CORPUS ACT.

*The attorney-general moved that the title of the act of the last session of parliament which enabled his Majesty to secure such persons as he shall suspect, &c. be read; which being done he moved, "That leave be given to bring in a bill to continue the provisions of the said act for a time to be limited."*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that in one thing only he could agree with the learned gentleman whose motion had been just read, namely, "That to proceed in the discussion of such a subject, in so thin a house, would be improper;" for no person could have imagined that such a measure should have been brought forward at all, much less be debated, when the number of members was barely sufficient to form a house. As the call of the house was so near, he, for his own part, doubted whether it would not be as good a course as any he could take, to suffer this motion to pass, and to reserve opposition to the day of the discussion. There was one thing, however, to be observed from the thinness of the house, and which appeared to him to be a good omen:—it proved, that the house in general did not believe in the existence of any plots or conspiracies, on the foundation of which the habeas corpus act was suspended; so little did they think so, that they had not even the curiosity to come and hear the learned gentleman open the merits of his case. He, therefore, took it for granted, that he should not hear of any new plots, or new conspiracies, or new discovery of treasonable practices; for, in the threatened speech of the attorney-general, there was not one word of fresh information;—it was evident he intended to make his case out of the good old plot. However, he must say, as

nothing new had been said on the subject, he could not expect but that all those who opposed the former bill must be against this motion; and if he did not take the sense of the house upon the question, even in this stage of the business, it was because he did not wish to show to the public the thinness of the house upon such an occasion.

*The house divided—for the motion 71; against it 13.*

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JANUARY 16.

MILITARY OPERATIONS IN HOLLAND.

MR. SHERIDAN observed that, though the secretary of state for the war department was absent, yet, as the secretary of war was in his place, he wished to ask him a question. He considered that, in the present calamitous situation of affairs, the public had great cause to complain of the want of early and authentic intelligence with respect to the events passing in Holland. No gazette had appeared to announce the particulars of what had lately happened in that quarter. This he considered as a very unpardonable neglect, with respect to the public, at a period when affairs wore so alarming an aspect, and particularly distressing to the individuals who had relatives with the army, and were thus left in a state of the most painful anxiety and suspense with respect to their fate.

*Mr. Pitt said, that he could scarcely conceive the hon. gentleman to be serious in the remark which he had now brought forward. What interest could he possibly conceive ministers to have in keeping from the public the knowledge of any disaster for a space of twenty-four hours, whatever regret they might feel upon the occasion? The fact however was, that a gazette had been some time in preparation, and was now, he believed, printed off; and had the hon. gentleman gone home, he would have found the answer to his question in a copy of the gazette upon his table.*

Mr. Sheridan said, that he found it difficult to account how the right hon. gentleman should conceive him to be otherwise than serious in the disastrous situation of affairs into which the country had been brought by the present—not to use a harsher term—unfortunate administration; a situation which was becoming every day more and more alarming. He was equally at a loss to account what preparation could be necessary in order to lay before the public a simple narrative of facts. Ministers might make light of a delay of twenty-four hours in communicating in-



telligence; but if they were so negligent of their duty to the public, yet still some consideration was due to the feelings of those individuals who were kept upon the rack from uncertainty with respect to the fate of their relatives, and to them a delay of twenty-four hours was a consideration of no small consequence.

PRUSSIAN SUBSIDY.

Mr. Sheridan stated that, as the arrangements were settled at present, he should take the first opportunity to move for the correspondence relative to the Prussian subsidy, as he considered it of great consequence, before we entered into new engagements with the emperor, to ascertain what use had been made of the money already taken from this country in the way of subsidy, and what reliance could be placed on the fidelity of our continental allies.

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JANUARY 22.

CARLISLE PETITION FOR PEACE.

*Mr. Curwen presented this petition, and Lord Morpeth a protest against it, signed by fourteen hundred persons, on the ground that petitions of this description would only tend to clog the wheels of government. A debate ensued.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, the only part he should wish to consider of what had fallen from the gentleman on the other side was, whether, to make use of the phrase of the right hon. gentleman, it should be the fashion to discountenance petitions from the people. This, he confessed, appeared to him to be the tendency of the speeches of those gentlemen.—The house had been told, that every one knew the ease with which a petition might be framed and signed; it was true that it was in the compass of every man's experience to know with what great facility ministers, aided by influence and corruption, could procure addresses and petitions; but he was yet to learn that men are easily prevailed on to come boldly forward, and oppose the prevailing sentiments of those who had been gained over by ministerial arts. The noble lord who had opened the business of the protest had conducted himself with great fairness and candour; he was sorry to say his example had not been imitated by the gentleman who followed him. By what that gentleman (Mr. Wallace) had advanced, three new propositions had been started, in which he supposed it probable that ministers would follow him. The first

of these new propositions was, that it was improper for constituents to instruct their representatives. This was the language held out by the protestors and the gentlemen who had spoken on that protest; not at all applying the observation to the particular case, but generally to all cases of instruction from constituents. The second proposition was, that it was a disrespect to government to make any application to parliament for the alteration of any system of measures pursued by administration; for they conceive it to be clogging the wheels of government. The third was, that public meetings were not proper places to collect the sense of a number of people. This proposition could not be confined to the people of Carlisle; for the hon. gentleman did not mean to say there was any essential difference between them and other men, that should make it more difficult to collect their sentiments, than it was in other places. These propositions being so palpable to the administration, he should not be surprised at seeing them supported. A triumphant appeal had been made by a right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) to the plain sense of the house, with respect to what had fallen from his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox) as to the difference between the petitions and the protestors. He should appeal to that plain sense if the protestors had thought, as was contended, that a vigorous prosecution of the war was the only mode of obtaining a firm and permanent peace, why had they not so stated it? Why was not the proposition that the war was irrational, and likely to produce the most fatal consequences to the country, denied to the protestors? With respect to the comparison of the numbers, the hon. gentleman would pardon him if he was not inclined wholly to take for granted whatever was advanced on that subject. That gentlemen had shewn that he was not sufficiently careful to guard against mistakes with regard to the petition; he could not, therefore, expect there should be no suspicion as to his accuracy on the other side. Though that gentleman appeared to think that the petitioners were not in general entitled to respect, yet it was not therefore clear to every one that they were not. The number had been stated to be contemptible; he should recollect that the petition purported only to be signed by freemen; whereas the other was signed by various descriptions of persons. It was curious to observe, that the protestors should presume to tell those men who were constituents, that it was improper for them



to instruct their representatives, when they themselves had done a similar thing, though not the constituents of the persons whom they addressed. One thing was evident, that they would not have thought it necessary to have framed this protest, unless they had apprehended that the example of the petitioners would be followed by the country. He had no doubt those apprehensions would be justified, whenever a meeting of the country should be called.

*The petition and protest were ordered to lie on the table.*

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY ON THE ARMY.

Mr. Sheridan said, it was agreed that government should have all possible support from every man in that house towards the increase of the navy ; but he was not very sanguine in the mode in which ministers would proceed upon that subject. He thought we ought to have a strong and powerful corps of marines, who might be taught in time to become sailors, and they might again be supplied by landsmen ; but he understood that marines were prohibited, by order, from going aloft, or doing any of the duty of a sailor. Having made these observations, he proceeded to ask the secretary of war some questions. First, whether he intended to do something to prevent that inhuman practice which brought so much disgrace on the service—he meant the practice of crimping ? If he did, Mr. Sheridan should leave the matter in the hands of a person to whom it so properly belonged ; if not, he must bring something forward on that subject. He then adverted to the dreadful state of the troops now at Plymouth, who were dying by twelve and fourteen a day ; and he wished to know whether they were intended to be sent to the West Indies ? if they were, he feared there would be scarcely any of them alive to land there, for they had been kept so many months on board, that they were now entirely unfit for service.

*The secretary at war took notice of all the observations of Mr. Sheridan. He said that the detention of the troops at Plymouth arose from circumstances which human prudence had no means of preventing ; they were detained by contrary winds, and from the apprehensions that, if they sailed, they might meet the enemy with a force not equal to their protection ; as to their destination, that was a question which ought not to be answered. He denied their being in a state which Mr. Sheridan had represented, although they might be a good deal afflicted from unavoidable circumstances. With regard to the orders of the admiralty with respect to marines, he knew but little of it officially, but he be-*

*lieved that nothing had been done in this war which has not been usual in every war. With regard to crimping, no man detested it more than he did; he viewed it, as every honest man did, with horror and indignation. He had done, and he would continue to do, everything in his power totally to suppress so detestable a practice.*

Mr. Sheridan remarked, that the secretary of war had made a distinction between things which he ought not, and things which he could not answer. He had declined answering, whether the troops on board the transports were destined for the West Indies; but had afterwards stated, they had been prevented by certain winds from sailing to the place of their destination. On the subject of these troops, he could not help stating that the hon. gentleman discovered a very great deficiency of information; and he should think it incumbent upon him to move for returns of those troops, and an account of their situation, &c. An inquiry into the scandalous, cruel, and criminal neglect by which these men had been detained five or six months on board the transports, in a sickly and languishing state, would, he trusted, not come by itself, but form part of an investigation of the causes which had produced all the disgraces and disasters of the war. The right hon. gentleman had styled the victory of Lord Howe decisive; upon that supposition ministers indeed had acted, but the event now proved otherwise. We had soldiers at Plymouth; he asked why we had not sailors? He was told, the troops there had been detained, partly by contrary winds, and partly from the danger of encountering the fleet of the enemy. Why had they not a sufficient convoy to protect them? If the French West India islands, which had been held out as our boasted indemnity in the present war, should fail for the want of timely succour, he would have a right to impute their loss to the deficiency of the navy.

Mr. Sheridan, adverting to the difficulty of raising marines, asked why a bounty was not given for encouraging that service? He blamed the remissness of ministers in not sending the troops soon enough abroad the transports, as much as their negligence in afterwards detaining them; the delay was the more remarkable, as, in the interim, General Vaughan and Admiral Caldwell had sailed for the West Indies, and arrived in safety. The right hon. gentleman had stated that they had been allowed all the tonnage fixed by regulation, but the difference was consider-



able between keeping men aboard transports only five or six weeks, and detaining them the same number of months. He understood there were six hundred men now sick on shore, and eight hundred on board, and it was the opinion, that by the time they arrived in the West Indies, all of them would be unfit for service:—so that the best method would be to disembark them, and get new transports for the expedition. If the succours to be afforded to the West Indies, depended entirely on the reinforcement expected from these troops, he must look with a desponding eye to the situation of affairs in that quarter.

*The resolutions were read and agreed to.*

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JANUARY 29.

HABEAS CORPUS ACT.

*The third reading being agreed to, the attorney-general moved that the bill do pass.*

MR. SHERIDAN rose and said, he was extremely sorry he had not been present the preceding evening, when some very strong observations were made by a right hon. friend of his (Mr. Fox) on the subject of the legal doctrines which had been delivered relative to the construction of the statute 25 Edward III. He said he perfectly coincided with his right hon. friend, in the observations he had made, though he would not press his sentiments on the house at that time, but should reserve them for some future opportunity. He declared he had opposed the bill in every stage, because he totally disapproved both of the principle and provisions of it—so much so, that he could not suffer it to pass now without giving it his positive negative.

*Ayes 68 ; noes 4.*

MIXTURE OF FLOUR IN HAIR POWDER.

*Mr. Robinson gave notice of a motion for a committee of the whole house, to take into consideration the most effectual means for preventing the mixture of flour in hair powder ; a mischief which, at the present moment, called for the most serious attention of parliament.*

Mr. Sheridan said, that several communications had been made to him upon the subject ; but one in particular, which he thought it peculiarly incumbent on him to mention now to the house, and that was, the astonishing quantity of flour which was

used as a substitute for hair powder, by the soldiers of this country. This, in a moment of apprehended scarcity of corn, deserved the most deliberate and attentive consideration of parliament. He was sorry he had not the calculation about him; but he would assure the house it was of such a magnitude as to be almost beyond conception, and which, when they heard, it would very greatly surprise them. As the hon. member, however, had mentioned his intention of bringing the subject before the house, he thought it his duty to take the opportunity of saying thus much on the subject, in order that his Majesty's servants might take the earliest opportunity of availing themselves of all the information on the subject, which their situation so well enabled them to do.

## FEBRUARY 2.

## CITY PETITION ON THE LOAN.

*Mr. Alderman Curtis presented a petition from the liverymen of London, setting forth, that the petitioners felt it their duty, at this time, to express to the house their firm attachment to the constitution of this country, as established at the glorious revolution. That the petitioners have seen with concern, that the measures which have been hitherto exerted for bringing this war to a happy conclusion, have not yet accomplished that desirable end, but they firmly rely on Divine Providence that the bravery and ardour of our navy and army will be ultimately successful: and therefore, praying that the house will, in their wisdom, adopt such measures as shall effectually defend this country against its enemies, and obtain the blessings of peace, whenever it can be effected consistently with the honour and dignity of the state, and with that permanent security for which alone peace is desirable, as important to the very existence of our trade, commerce, and prosperity.*

*The question being put, "That this petition be laid on the table,"*

MR. SHERIDAN observed, the worthy alderman called this petition, the petition of the liverymen of London. Now, as the house were likely to have petitions in abundance for a peace, it would be right that those who directed their representatives to present them should know, when petitions were signed, whether they were to be understood in that house as petitions of war, or of peace. There were many names, he observed, to the present petition; he did not mean to insinuate they were not respectable men; on the contrary, he had no doubt they were so: but when it was said this was the petition of the livery of London, it was necessary that neither the house of commons nor the



public should be misinformed upon that point. There had already been held a very numerous meeting of the liverymen of the city of London, who had petitioned the house for peace. Did the worthy alderman mean to deny that the sense of the livery of London, in common hall assembled, had not been decidedly expressed in favour of peace, and that peace as speedily as possible? It was absolutely necessary, therefore, that petitioners should understand the precise terms of their petitions, and above all, the use which their representatives made of them. Many liverymen signed the petition which was agreed upon at the common hall, and which had been already laid upon the table of that house; was it to be now insinuated that this petition came from a more respectable body of the same livery, and was intended to pass in that house as a sort of counter petition? He had no doubt but many of the respectable persons who signed this petition, might have been told that this petition was worded in a more temperate and respectful manner than that which had been agreed upon at the common hall, and that such a representation of the matter might have induced many who signed it to do so, and yet the intention might be, to use it as a petition for a continuance of war. He was justified in suspecting this to be the case, and in saying so, for he knew the tricks and shuffles by which the public were imposed upon. The whole system upon which the war had been commenced and carried on, was misrepresentation and delusion. It was in this manner some persons had already been induced to sign some petitions, and he had no doubt that others would be tampered with in the same way; it was the minister's system. Nothing would better illustrate that system than the answer which the minister had advised his Majesty to give to the address of the common council of the city of London. Did not the common council understand they were asking for peace as speedily as could be obtained, consistently with the honour and safety of this country? In his Majesty's answer was there to be found one word about peace? On the contrary, did he not declare he considered it as an encouragement to continue the war? This was the system of ministers. Now, if they really wished for petitions for carrying on a vigorous prosecution of the war, upon their own plan, why did they not come at once boldly forward, and say that such was their intention? Why did not members who

presented such petitions avow it candidly to be their intentions to support the minister in his own way, until he shall establish a government of his own forming in France, or until this country was ruined? If that was what they meant, let them come boldly forward and avow it. If this was fairly and honestly explained, they would not get the names of honest men to any petitions so ambiguously worded, as to admit of the possibility of making more than one construction upon them. If this was properly understood by the people, he would venture to say, they would not get the names of twenty men to any petition that asked for anything but peace, unless they were contractors, pensioners, and jobbers, who derived all their wealth from the bowels of the poor. He should be happy to hear any explanation upon this petition from the worthy alderman who presented it.

*Mr. Alderman Curtis replied.*

Mr. Sheridan said, he did not mean to make any insinuations against the petitioners, but he was glad that the matter had been in some degree explained, and that this was now to be understood as a counter petition to that agreed upon at the common hall. But the worthy alderman had thrown out something like an insinuation against the common hall, by which he believed they would not abide. They had said, that the proceedings of that common hall did not express the sense of a majority of the livery of London. Let them try the effect in another common hall.

*The petition was ordered to lie on the table.*

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FEBRUARY 5.

PRUSSIAN SUBSIDY.

MR. SHERIDAN said, that upon a former occasion he and another hon. gentleman had endeavoured to get some information of the services performed by the King of Prussia, during the last campaign, in consequence of his engagements with this country. Some returns had lately been laid on the table on that subject, but they contained no information. It appeared that the King of Prussia had received from this country the enormous sum of £1,200,000, without having rendered it even the smallest service. He thought it therefore necessary, previous to the discussion of the imperial loan, to come to some resolution with respect



to this conduct on the part of his Prussian Majesty. It was certainly no argument against granting a loan to the emperor that the King of Prussia had violated his faith. But this circumstance ought certainly to enforce on the house the necessity of caution, and induce them to take some step in the present instance that might operate as a warning with respect to future transactions of the same sort. His Majesty had stated in his message, that he had received from the emperor the strongest assurances of a disposition to make the greatest exertions, provided he should be assisted by a loan of four millions from this country. He understood, if he could rely upon the credit of public statements, that in another country the parliament had been told of the absolute determination of his Majesty to guarantee this loan. This was a language which he considered as very unbecoming when addressed to the representatives of the nation, and as highly improper in ministers, who were, of course, responsible for whatever proceeded from the throne. Before such a determination had been expressed, he should have wished to have had something like a positive determination from his imperial Majesty to make the exertions which were to be the conditions of the loan. He should more particularly have wished for such a declaration from the imperial court, which had at all times been proverbially distinguished by ill-faith. He recollected on this subject a strong expression of a right hon. gentleman (Mr. Wyndham), who said, that since the capture of Richard I. the conduct of the court of Vienna had been marked by an uniform series of treachery towards this country. To guard against this treachery, he thought that nothing would be better than for the house of commons to show themselves alive to their duty on the present occasion. There were some men who, though insensible to the calls of honour, were yet not callous to the sense of shame. Some men of that description might be found among the ministers of Austria. It might therefore be of importance, by way of warning to them, to come to some resolution expressive of indignation and contempt, with respect to the violation of faith on the part of his Prussian Majesty. Mr. Sheridan here referred to that article of the treaty, in which it was stipulated that 60,000 Prussians should co-operate with the British troops, and that a commissioner should be appointed for the purpose of watching over the observance of this article. From the scraps of letters laid upon

the table, it appeared that no commissioner had been appointed for this purpose. This, he contended, would not have been the case, except ministers had been aware that the King of Prussia, from the very first, was indisposed to perform his duty. He referred also to the memorial of the emperor, which stated, that the effective co-operation of the Prussians might have been the means of saving Brabant, and in consequence of preserving Holland. Such were the effects stated by his imperial Majesty to have resulted from the breach of faith in his Prussian Majesty. In his answer to this memorial, addressed to the circles of the empire, that monarch shows a degree of apprehension that he should have even been supposed to have had the smallest disposition to keep faith towards this country, after he had once received its money. He should therefore conclude with moving this resolution—"That it appears to this house, that the King of Prussia received from the treasury of Great Britain, the sum of £1,200,000, in consequence of the stipulations of the treaty concluded at the Hague on the 10th of April, 1794, and that it does not appear to this house that the King of Prussia performed the stipulations of that treaty."

*Mr. Pitt replied, and concluded by moving the order of the day.*

Mr. Sheridan adverted to Mr. Pitt's having complained of the time at which he had brought forward his motion; from the sort of notice which he had formerly given, the right hon. gentleman might naturally have expected that this was the very day which he would have chosen for that purpose. An hon. baronet (Sir Wm. Pultney) had stated that he had made up his opinion from extensive materials. What was the situation of the country when ministers refused to give the information to that house, which they had communicated to an individual? They surely had a right to be informed how the King of Prussia had acted much better for the common cause, than if he had kept the terms of the treaty. However problematical the position might appear, there could be no doubt that there were two individuals, the worthy baronet and his Prussian Majesty, who exactly coincided in that sentiment. He again quoted the authority of the emperor, who stated that the Prussian troops might have been employed to great advantage in Brabant. He explained his former allusion to the Prussian treaty with regard to the immediate co-operation of the British and Prussian troops, as exactly conformable



to the spirit by which that treaty was dictated. The right hon. gentleman had said, that he, by his motion, had pledged himself to vote for the imperial loan. No conclusion could possibly be more unfair. It would have been the most indecent and unparliamentary thing for him to give any opinion on that loan, before he had heard the arguments by which it was supported by the right hon. gentleman, and the security which its stipulations afforded to the country. But, from the manner in which the minister had conducted himself that day, by resorting to the order of the day, in order to get rid of the resolution which he had moved, and refusing to declare to the country the violation of faith on the part of the King of Prussia, a violation which they were themselves compelled to admit, he pledged himself that this should be the last loan to which he would give his assent.

*The question was put on Mr. Pitt's motion ; ayes 128 ; noes 33.*

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FEBRUARY 6.

MR. GREY'S MOTION FOR PEACE WITH FRANCE.

Mr. Grey moved the following resolutions: "*Resolved, that this house considering that in the support which it has given to his Majesty in the prosecution of the present war, it has at no time had any other object, but to restore to these kingdoms the blessings of an equitable peace. That with a view to accomplish this humane and desirable end, every formal difficulty which may stand in the way of a pacific negotiation with the powers with which we are at war, ought, in the first instance, to be removed; and that without some acknowledgment of the existence of a competent power in France with which his Majesty may negotiate, and conclude a treaty of peace on just and reasonable terms for both parties, there can be no termination of the present war, but in the destruction of one of them.*

"*Considering farther, that the existence of such a competent power in France has been directly acknowledged by several of the powers of Europe, as well as by the United States of America, with all of whom, during the present war, France has maintained the accustomed relation of peace and amity:*

"*And, considering also the existence of such a competent power in France has been, in various instances, virtually admitted, even by the belligerent powers themselves, some of whom have entered into public resolutions to make overtures for peace, is of opinion that the government now existing in France is competent to entertain and conclude a negotiation for peace with Great Britain.*"

*The question was put and negatived without a division.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that he would not have troubled the house, but on account of the misapprehension which had taken

place with respect to the motion. He should not now enter into the general question, much less into the conversation which had taken place respecting places and pensions; he was very happy to hear the disinterested declaration of the hon. and learned gentleman (Mr. East), but when that hon. gentleman talked of the honour and character of the house being involved in such discussion, he surely did not mean to insinuate that the honour and character of the house rested with placemen and pensioners; and when he expressed his apprehensions, that if the idea was so much bandied about, the public might at last suspect that there was something in it, he was not, perhaps, aware that the public had already made up their minds on the subject. They had discovered that the calamities and disasters which the country had experienced, were the effects of the misconduct of ministers, and deducible from the corruption of the government. They had discovered what he could prove to be true, that peace, and possession of places by the same men who now held them, were incompatible. That this was the case would be manifest from one consideration; the French will not treat with the present ministers; to this it might be said, shall it be endured by a great nation, that its enemies shall dictate to it what ministers it shall have? This, however, was exactly the plan that the house was pursuing with respect to France, and it was naturally received in that country with as much indignation as it would be in this. The house were voting under the influence of delusion; and he wished that ministers would lay aside all quibbling and prevarication, and give him a plain answer to a plain question, in order to make themselves intelligible to all. Would they, or would they not, make peace to-morrow with the government of France, provided they could procure fair and honourable terms? This was the point at issue, and he wished to know whether the house would uphold ministers in refusing to negotiate with the present government of France, although terms might be procured consistent with the security of the nation. He firmly believed, that the silent conviction of the house was against such a proposition, but they had been deceived and deluded. The possession of Brabant and Holland appeared to him as affording much stronger arguments for peace than for a continuance of the war. If we were to be reduced to the situation of distress, to which the minister had declared we ought to arrive, before we



listened to any proposition for peace, the question then would be, not how to treat, but how to capitulate. The French nation wanted a peace, he believed, as much as this country; nor could he see there was any probability that they would obstinately adhere to the war, if the attempt were made for negotiation; and he must believe it the duty of ministers to make that attempt. The amendment on a former evening had been quoted, but every person had forgotten a very essential part, viz. the amendment which he had the honour to propose to Mr. Pitt's. By negating the proposition on that amendment, the house had pledged themselves not to make peace with the present governors of France. The intentions of the house and those of the first minister, he considered as directly opposite, for he believed that they wished to negotiate if they could ensure security; whereas the right hon. gentleman was determined, at no rate, to make peace with the present government of France.

*The house divided on the previous question. Ayes 190; noes 60.*

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MARCH 19.

WAYS AND MEANS—MILITIA.

*The report of the committee of ways and means was brought up and read. The resolutions for the paying and clothing of the militia was agreed to. On reading the resolution, "That provisions be made for subaltern officers of the militia, in certain cases, in time of peace," a debate took place.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that he did not mean now to enter fully into the business; he should wait till he saw the nature of that provision which was proposed to be brought forward. He certainly, however, considered the present measure as a step towards destroying the great constitutional distinction which existed between the militia and the army. He stated the pay given to officers in the militia to be not in the nature of a remuneration for their services, but as a compensation for the expense of their attendance. He took notice of the argument urged by the hon. gentleman who had spoken last, that the proposed provision would prevent spirited young men of property from taking, in the first instance, the rank of lieutenants; all the captains would have to be selected from the gentlemen of the county of a certain description of property, and those who were placed in that rank would thus be precluded from the benefit of any previous e:

rience or knowledge of the service. He postponed any further remarks, till he had an opportunity to discuss the particular provision intended to be made. He had only one observation to add; it was rather an unfortunate symptom with respect to the dispositions of the nation, that in a war which had so often been represented as calling for the zeal, the spirit, the exertions and sacrifices of the people in a greater degree than any former contest, it should be found necessary to hold out additional inducements for men to enter into a service, where their assistance was only required for the defence of their country.

*The resolution was agreed to.*

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MARCH 24.

MR. FOX'S MOTION FOR A COMMITTEE ON THE STATE OF THE NATION.

*Mr. Fox concluded a long and eloquent speech, by moving, "That this house do resolve itself into a committee of the whole house, to consider the state of the nation." Mr. Pitt replied, and moved "That the house do now adjourn."*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that though he did not imagine that any addition could be made, by any exertions of his, to the arguments which his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox) had urged with so much ability and eloquence, yet he thought it necessary to address to the house a few observations on what had just fallen from the chancellor of the exchequer. He was fully convinced that the arguments of Mr. Fox had, in no one instance, been answered by the right hon. gentleman, whose talents and understanding were such, as seldom left him without resources on such occasions; he therefore had this additional reason to make him feel satisfied with the impressions which his right hon. friend's animated and brilliant speech had left on his mind; he was fully persuaded that it was unanswerable. The arguments of Mr. Pitt went the full length of contending, that no calamities which might befall the country, no neglect or misconduct of ministers, however productive of the most mischievous and pernicious consequences, would justify a call upon the house to inquire into the actual state of the nation, or to investigate the causes of such calamities and the effects of such misconduct. He had, with great ingenuity and art, passed by and neglected the whole of the strong arguments which had been so forcibly urged to induce the house



to agree to a motion of so beneficial a tendency ; and not only had he done so, but had perfectly mis-stated and misrepresented the whole of those arguments he had noticed. The question which had been put to the house for their investigation was, whether or not so great a portion of calamity had been suffered by the country during the progress of this unhappy war, as to show that blame must be attached somewhere ; and whether it was not becoming the dignity and character of the house to inquire where that blame lay. The right hon. gentleman, however, had stated, that the motion was brought forward for the purpose of reversing the determination of the house ; and that it was too late, because the effect of it would be to make the house retract the whole declarations they had made from the beginning of the session. This was a gross misrepresentation ; for the question of war and peace had been carefully kept out of sight during the whole of the speech of his right hon. friend. The house, indeed, had been called upon to inquire whether they chose to pursue the same object by the same means, and whether they would leave the execution of their designs in the same hands in which they had so long been invested. At the conclusion of his speech, the chancellor of the exchequer had allowed that misconduct of ministers was a proper object of inquiry, and that, if they should be proved to have misconducted themselves, a motion ought to be made for their removal ; he, at the time, insinuated that their successors should not be persons who would disgrace the country by their conduct. It was no difficult matter to find men who would not disgrace the country as much as the present administration even, he believed, in the lines of opposition. The removal of his Majesty's ministers, undoubtedly, was the tendency of his right hon. friend's motion, not, however, in the hasty and precipitate manner proposed by the minister, but after a deliberate inquiry into their conduct, and a serious investigation of the degree of blame which they had incurred by the calamities and disasters which the country had experienced. After the chancellor of the exchequer had observed, that those who thought with his right hon. friend as to the conduct of ministers, and their want of vigour manifested in our operations both by land and sea, ought to move for their immediate removal, he had said that there was an implied attack on the commanders and officers of the army and navy ; nothing could be more unjustly imputed than

this assertion, for Mr. Fox had particularly stated, that he imputed the whole to the negligence and folly of the administration. The right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had contended that this discussion ought to have been brought forward previous to the vote of supply ; he, however, should wish to know what that gentleman would have said if this had been done. Would he not have said, that it could only proceed from a factious and turbulent spirit to agitate a question of such a nature while the enemy is at the door, and the house had not granted those aids which could alone enable the country to resist the dangers which threatened them ? He seemed, therefore, to think that, after a supply had been granted, all inquiry into the conduct of ministers was at an end ; as if a supply for the immediate defence of the country were to be an act of indemnity for all the misconduct and imprudence which had been the cause of such mischievous effects to the country. That such inquiry was necessary, he was fully persuaded ; he did not believe there were ten persons, either in or out of the house, who did not think that the war had been scandalously misconducted. The imagination of man could not conceive another country where ministers could retain their situations after a scene of calamities unparalleled in the annals of Europe, and a continuance of misconduct unexampled in history.

What answers could possibly be given by gentlemen to their constituents, when asked why, after the numerous and heavy burthens which had been laid on the people, the house had not thought proper to institute an inquiry into the conduct of government ? It might certainly happen, that the events which had taken place might be such as human wisdom and human exertions could not prevent ; he, however, believed that this would not be found to be the case ; yet he saw no other answer that could be given to gentlemen's constituents, if the committee were refused, than that they had not considered the matter. The same answer must be returned, if it was asked why no inquiry had been made into the transaction with the King of Prussia ; as also the conduct of the Empress of Russia, who had fulfilled no article of her treaty ; or the reasons why no measures had been taken to enforce her compliance with her agreement. If it should be inquired of them whether the retreat of the army on the continent, which was by no means dishonourable to the officers who conducted it, was not the effect



of the mismanagement of ministers? and they should answer as, they must, that they did not think it worth while to inquire into this and the various other misfortunes which had attended us, would it not degrade the house in the eyes of their constituents? It would be better to suspend the meeting, nay the very existence of the house of commons, if they neglected to exercise one of the chief duties of their situation, that of inquiry into the conduct of administration. Another part of Mr. Fox's speech had been treated by the chancellor of the exchequer in a very loose manner, as if it were too insignificant and trifling to deserve the smallest attention—he meant the conduct of our ambassadors to the neutral powers. The uniformity of their conduct in all the instances which had been mentioned by his hon. friend, though it had not been openly avowed that they had acted conformably to their instructions, yet tended to show it was a part of the system; and indeed the right hon. gentleman himself had, in some measure, allowed it to be a fair inference, when he attempted to prove that it was not inconsistent with the law of nations. Their moderation to neutral nations had been extolled; but what was that moderation? They had undoubtedly acted with temper and decency towards the powerful neutral nations; but as to the small ones, such as Genoa and Tuscany, they had been bullied with the most outrageous insolence to join the union, which must have infallibly produced their ruin. It had been the boast of ministers, and had been stated in the king's speech as a matter of praise, that this country had kept a strict neutrality at the early periods of the contest with France. In what book of the law of nations could it be found, that when a country was forced into a war, as ministers asserted we had been, it became a crime for other nations to preserve a neutrality which had been the boast of the country supposed to be forced into the war? Another mode of shifting the principal question had been adopted by the chancellor of the exchequer; he had dwelt so long on the topic of the state of the sister kingdom, that any person, who had not heard his right hon. friend, would have supposed that an inquiry into the state of that country had been the sole object of the motion. Unfortunately, however, it was in the recollection of every gentleman in the house, that full three hours of his friend's speech had

elapsed previously to his saying anything on that part of the subject; it must also be remembered, that notice had been given of the motion at a period when the ill effects of the misconduct of ministers towards Ireland were not so well known; therefore the whole of the declaration on that subject fell entirely to the ground. As a collateral foundation for inquiry, this subject was peculiarly proper; for when only this one circumstance remained to complete their climax of folly, that they should contrive to place the Irish in such a situation as to hazard, through their irritation, a separation of the empire, such a circumstance was a great aggravation of the rest of their misconduct. The minister had affected a great deal of delicacy about the independence of Ireland; did he mean to contend that no degree of misconduct, with regard to that country, could authorize an inquiry in this? Whether, however, we considered the persons acting there as acting in no other light than as an ambassador, and that his own misconduct, or the instructions of the minister at home, had produced consequences which were likely to effect a rupture, he conceived that it was proper to consider whether the minister or the ambassador ought to be impeached.

This was the second attempt which had been made during the present administration to deprive Ireland of some of its rights: in the year 1785, the Irish propositions, as they were called, were brought forward, which were an invidious attempt to deprive them of rights, under pretence of giving them some commercial advantages which were perfectly fallacious. Ireland, though she had suffered the greatest injustice from the government of this country for a very long period, yet, when she began to receive a tardy and lingering justice, generously blotted out all remembrance of her injuries, therefore a peculiar nicety ought to be observed in our conduct towards her; notwithstanding which, there never were any transactions marked with stronger features of inhumanity and injustice, wherever the guilt lay, than the conduct observed towards her in the late affair. The two alternatives stated by his right hon. friend, and which had been treated by the chancellor of the exchequer as absurd, appeared to him to be completely clear and distinct; and he thought their policy and prudence had been shown by the strongest arguments.



It had been asked, with some triumph, if we were to give up indemnity and reparation? As to reparation, he conceived that if we had succeeded, there would have been full reparation and ample punishment; for what more could be expected than the overthrow of our adversaries as a punishment to them, and reparation to us? It was folly, in order to rouse the people of this country to exertion, to attempt to unite two objects not reconcileable. The mercenary system of indemnity first begun by Great Britain, showing the hypocrisy of her former declarations of regard only to the order of society, and the interests of religion and morality, had given cause for distrust and want of cordiality among the allies. It was not surprising, after Great Britain had taken the West Indies and other valuable possessions for herself, that Germany and Prussia should take what they could for themselves. It was natural, though not honourable, unless princes had different rules of honour from other persons, for our allies to endeavour to get from us what they could, as a compensation for what we were taking for ourselves. The situation of our allies was a very material consideration, because there was a prospect of our carrying on the war by ourselves; nothing was stated of the chance of any co-operation with us in the ensuing campaign.

With respect to population, the chancellor of the exchequer had said that 12,000 was a small proportion; but he chose to forget that this was only in one parish. The waste of men, in fact, was incalculable; the returns of losses were fallacious, as containing only a partial account of those who perished. That this war was attended with a waste of men which we were incapable of bearing, was a fact which spoke for itself and of which any one would be convinced who looked at the things called *men*, who were now enlisted; the great proportion of boys and old men showed that we were nearly exhausted. As to the great increase of commerce, it should be observed that accidental circumstances had given a very unnatural increase to it; for every capture of ships with exported goods on board, necessarily caused a farther exportation to supply the deficiency. As to the resources of the country, he had never been so sanguine as his right hon. friend; there was one resource, however, which would be highly grateful to the country. He did not think of the taxes brought forward this year; nor of the state of the

country, perhaps less exceptionable could scarcely be found. The resource he wished to have recourse to, viz. a tax on places and pensions, had excited indignation in the minds of the ministers as low and vulgar, and perhaps would have the same effect again. If, as it had been stated, that gentlemen would serve their country without at the same time serving themselves, we certainly had at present a most gentlemanly administration; and one gentleman (Mr. Secretary Dundas) is three times a greater gentleman than any of them, for he has three places! Whether gentlemen had made up their minds upon this topic he could not tell, but there was yet time for a more explicit declaration. He wished to know what were the views of administration as to the government of France; did they speculate on the destruction of the republic and restoration of monarchy? As for himself, he explicitly declared he neither looked for, nor wished any such thing, having the interests of the country at heart; he considered the natural consequences of such an attempt to be a lingering perseverance in the war, which would shake the foundation on which the principles and security of our constitution were laid. If we hoped to excite civil discords in France, and depended on the supposed loyalists in that country, the consequences would be a long, bloody, and lingering contest, accumulation of debt, annihilation of commerce, and, finally, destruction of the constitution. One of the two alternatives would be the consequence in France—either a ferocious and sanguinary republic would be established, which would destroy order in Europe, or the old and inveterate enemy of England—the ancient despotism—would be restored; both of which would be equally fatal to us. If the principles of the present government in France were incompatible with order, the best way, he thought, would be to leave them to themselves, as the most likely method of correcting their errors. The great misfortune of the country was, that the minister's pride stood in the way of the interests of the people; for he knew that he must acknowledge the republic, in order to make peace; he was, however, only delaying the hour of his shame. If the committee were allowed, he had no doubt that everything his right hon. friend had said would appear to be true, and that the result would be a disposition to peace.

*The house divided on the question of adjournment; ayes 210; noes 63.*



MARCH 28.

## LONDON MILITIA BILL.

*This bill being read a third time,*

MR. SHERIDAN said, he thought it his duty to object to the bill, as it infringed the chartered rights and military privileges of the city of London. He contrasted the scandalous precipitancy with which the bill was passed last session, with the tardiness of the proceedings since that time. The honourable mover of the bill had last year declared the raising of the two regiments to be absolutely necessary for the protection and safety of the city; and he had urged the measure to be so immediately requisite, that it conveyed to men's minds a considerable degree of alarm for the peace and security of the metropolis. But it now appeared that he viewed the subject in a very different light; from the month of August last, the time in which the appeals were made, three months had elapsed before it was determined whether any amendments should be made to the bill; the committee had been three months more in making their report; and now three months in addition had been lost during the sitting of parliament, and all this time the city had been without either its new or its old militia. It had been boasted last session, that the bill would not affect the poor, as householders rated at £15 or upwards were alone affected by it; but this laudable circumstance was now done away, as the ward-rate was extended to every householder whatever, and even women, the lame and the blind, were affected by it. Nay, so far from favouring the poor, as had been asserted, the amendments seemed to be particularly levelled against the poor; for, by one of the clauses, the rich, who might be fined in £20 or upwards, might dispute the matter in Westminster Hall; while the poor, who might be fined in sums below that, were to be judged in a more summary way, without the benefit of a trial by jury. He said, there were several such inferior points as these which deserved attention; but the principal subject which he wished to urge was, the preservation of the military rights of the city, and he hoped the house would be cautious how they infringed them.

The city of London has from time	possessed the
right of commanding and keeping	militia. In
the 17th of Charles II. the	charters

of the city of London. In doing so, every charter, from the earliest time, was recited and renewed. The charter begins, "Charles II. by the grace of God," &c. and goes on, "we have seen the charter of William I." It then recites every charter verbatim, beginning each with "we have seen," and concludes with confirming the whole. The charters of Henry I., Henry II., Richard I., King John, and Henry III. all contain these words, "None of the citizens of London shall wage battle," which was nothing else than an exemption from being compelled to go to war. Edward II. being in want of men to reduce the castle of Leed, in Kent, applied to the Londoners, who expressed their disposition to march out and serve him, if it were not that doing so was against their charter, and might not only be construed to their prejudice in future, but such an innovation might endanger their whole franchises; whereupon he granted them letters of indemnity, which were recited and confirmed by Charles II. This right is still farther and more explicitly confirmed by the charter of the 1st of Edward III., which contains these words, "And that the said citizens from henceforth shall not be compelled to go or send to war out of the said city." This was also recited and renewed by Charles II., and thus we find that two years posterior to passing the act which the new bill is said to "amend," the sovereignty of the city over its own militia was fully confirmed. About twenty years afterwards, indeed, Charles II. issued a writ of *quo warranto*, and seized all the charters of London; but an act of parliament was passed in the 2nd of William and Mary, annulling everything done at that time, and renewing and confirming the chartered rights of the city; so that the privilege of the citizens in not being compelled to go or send to war out of the said city, is not only acknowledged by the charters of many monarchs, but has also been established by an act of the legislature. If the proceedings in 1695 and in 1745 are examined, it will also be found that the government admitted this right: for they only "recommended" to the corporation to draw out the militia. These facts, he thought, proved that the city always possessed the power of retaining its own military force at home for its own protection; and he was certain that no man could produce an instance wherein the king had commanded their services by proclamation, as he usually commands the other militia regiments; that is, contrary to the wish, or without consulting the



wishes of the citizens or corporation. Some gentlemen, however, had an idea that the act of the 13th and 14th of Charles II. destroyed this privilege, and he believed they built this opinion chiefly on the preamble, which recites, that "within all his Majesty's realms and dominions, the sole and supreme power, government, and command of the militia, and of all forces by sea and land, is, and ever was, the undoubted right of his Majesty and his royal predecessors; and that parliament cannot and ought not to pretend to the same, nor can levy war against his Majesty," &c. This, he argued, gave the king supreme authority over the London militia, when it was to move out of the city, or was to go into actual action, but he denied its giving the power of calling the militia out of the city, contrary to the wish of the citizens. It was a case exactly analogous to the general militia of the country. The king certainly possessed the supreme command over them, and yet, by act of parliament, he could not send them out of the kingdom; so with the London militia, the charters of the city, and the act of 2nd William and Mary, confirming those charters, expressly said, that the citizens should not be compelled to go or send to war out of the said city. Indeed, the preamble to the act of the 13th of Charles II. was rendered nugatory, so far as it might be supposed to relate to London, by the circumstance of that monarch having confirmed and renewed all the charters of the city, among which the right in question was asserted, two years after the passing of that act, namely, in the 15th year of his reign. Mr. Sheridan said he had no objection to the two regiments being raised for the defence of the city, but he begged they might not be considered as abolishing the ancient militia. Indeed, it would be ridiculous to call them the city militia, as they must be composed of mercenary recruits, strangers to the interests of the citizens. He therefore moved an amendment, which would have restored the ancient militia to its former state, if at any time of emergency it should be wanted, without putting the city to any additional expense.

*Mr. Lushington thanked the hon. gentleman for the zeal and regard which he showed for the city of London. He had equal zeal; but he could not see that there was any loss of honour in parting with the old Gothic establishment of trained bands, which, from want of discipline, could never be a  
- 6 -  
effective body of troops such as the new regiments were.  
city were not ambitious of military trusts -  
as magistrates, they knew that the mil*

*entrusted to military men ; they were sensible, also, that it was a more perfect defence for the city to have a military force that was capable of being sent to meet the danger, wherever it might present itself, than to be kept stationary within the precincts of the city. The bill had been very deliberately weighed and considered, not only by the common council, but also in the different wards ; the city of London had shown that they were most zealously attached to the principles of the constitution under which they lived, and they would be happy, he was sure, of marching to any part of the country which might be threatened by the enemy, sensible that London itself could only be safe in the general safety of the whole kingdom ; their military associations were truly honourable to their spirit and their patriotism, and surely the hon. gentleman could not desire that the population of the city of London should not contribute its proportion to the general defence.*

*Mr. Alderman Newnham contended that his Majesty had the power of sending the trained bands out of London in cases of invasion and insurrection. Of those trained bands, and of their discipline, he had no very high idea. The new corps would be infinitely more effective ; these corps must always be officered by freemen ; he had the honour to be appointed an officer of one of them.*

Mr. Sheridan, in reply, congratulated the citizens of London on the valuable acquisition of their new representative, who began his career in that house by an attack on their chartered rights. He had said the corporation consisted of excellent civil magistrates, who were wholly unfit for military duty ; and yet the worshipful lieutenant-colonel had told the house that all the field-officers were chosen out of the corporation. The hon. gentleman (Mr. Lushington) had observed, the old military privileges of London had been foolishly maintained, as one of the Gothic prejudices of our ancestors. True ; it might be so. Our ancestors had many such Gothic prejudices. They had a Gothic prejudice against a standing army ; they had a Gothic prejudice against the erection of barracks ; they had a Gothic notion of governing the city by the civil power, without the assistance of the military ; and, in short, they had so many Gothic notions about freedom and independence, that they had no doubt their memory was odious to the men of the present day. But he must own himself ashamed and indignant to hear this new city doctrine, which he must suppose to be the last and newest of the principles of the city, as it was avowed and promulgated by the newest member, just fresh in his seat, that the object and purpose of any military force could be the internal peace of the city ; for there had been a time when there existed a Gothic notion, that this might be preserved by the civil power ; and, in es



Gothic times, a Beckford had proved the fact. Nay, in this new and un-Gothic age, the present worthy chief magistrate had preserved the peace (in times said to be dangerous) by the civil power alone; for neither old trained bands, nor new militia, existed. These new anti-Gothic notions he dreaded, for while the military magistrate (Newnham) was preparing to cover Blackheath, he would not now be surprised if the new member (Lushington), in his zeal against Gothic prejudices, were to move for the erection of barracks around the Royal Exchange. The whole measure he considered as a juggle between the craft of despotism and the laziness of commercial luxury, assisted by the vanity and corruption of individuals; and the result was, in fact, the surrender of a great and proud distinction, which had been preserved with the greatest jealousy for many ages; accompanied with a mean acknowledgment that the city of London was no longer capable, without military aid, of preserving its own internal peace, much less of disputing the encroachments of power, should such a crisis arrive. Although convinced that this was one of the worst symptoms of the degraded and depraved spirit of the country which he had yet perceived, he denied that the measure was agreeable to all the respectable citizens, as had been asserted by Mr. Lushington, for he knew himself that a very respectable body of men continued firm in their opposition to the whole of the plan; he, however, feared that a majority of the citizens were duped and deluded into an indifference about it. Believing that his opposition would be ineffectual, he would not press the matter to a division. He had satisfied his own mind in stating his opinion, and a more decided one he never had formed on any subject.

*The amendment was withdrawn, and the bill passed.*

#### JUNE 1.

#### DEBTS OF THE PRINCE OF WALES.

*Mr. Anstruther, solicitor-general to the Prince of Wales, as Duke of Cornwall, acquainted the house that the Prince of Wales, while the question relative to his establishment was under the consideration of the house of commons, had thought the proper conduct for him to observe was to avoid expressing any opinion or wish upon the subject, fully sensible that the liberality and wisdom of parliament would make such arrangements as should be best suited to the situation of his affairs, the dignity of the royal family*

*lic. But,*

*having understood that it was the desire*

*What his*

*wishes and opinions upon the subject*

*had*

*authorized him to assure the house t*

tions may be adopted, as to the wisdom of parliament shall seem most expedient and advisable, for the purpose of establishing order and regularity in the expenditure of his income, and to prevent the incurring of debt in future. And, at the same time, his royal highness had authorized him farther to express his warmest desire that the house will appropriate such part of the income, which they may intend to allot to him, to the liquidation of the debts with which he is embarrassed, as, under all the present circumstances, shall seem to the wisdom and prudence of the house most expedient and advisable; fully sensible that, however large that appropriation may be, the house will be guided solely by the consideration of what shall appear to them the most conducive to his honour and the interest of the public. Mr. Pitt, in consequence of this communication, moved "That it be an instruction to the gentlemen who are appointed to prepare and bring in a bill for enabling his Majesty to grant a yearly sum or sums of money, out of the consolidated fund, towards providing for the establishment of their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales; that they do make provision in the said bill for establishing a regular and punctual order of payment in the prince's future expenditure, and for guarding against his incurring debts in future: and, also, for appropriating a proportion of the prince's annual income towards the gradual discharge of the incumbrances to which his royal highness is now subject." Mr. Bouverie moved an amendment, by inserting after the word "his," in that part of the message which provides "against his incurring any debts," the words "or any other branch of the royal family."

MR. SHERIDAN said it certainly was not his intention, in that stage of the business, to enter into any long discussion; when the proper time came he would speak out plainly, without courting popularity on one side, or fearing displeasure on the other. On the point that the house, by agreeing to the motion before them, were in no degree pledging themselves for the payment of the prince's debts, he differed from his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox). But he differed still more from the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) opposite. The only question that ought to be before them was, simply whether the debts were to be paid or not? But, by the mode in which it had been brought forward, this direct question might be evaded. The reasoning of his right hon. friend, with regard to an annual income to be allowed to the prince, might be true, but it could not be with the king's minister; for, if he required £125,000 as an adequate income for the prince, certainly he could not mean to pay his debts out of it; and if, on the other hand, a part was to be paid out of that sum, the house was pledged to pay those debts under the evasion of making a suitable provision for his royal highness. He would rather have preferred addressing the king upon the subject in the mode that had been followed. As to the language that



used, reprobating this application to parliament as a breach of promise, and other observations of that sort, he would not now give any opinion. The public certainly never would believe that the king's minister proposed an annual income of £125,000 for the prince, without any reference to the debts; they ought not to be trifled and quibbled with, by being told at the same time they were not pledged to pay them; and they ought not to be deluded, humbugged, and deceived in that way, but fairly and at once to know whether they were to pay the debts or not. To-night it was not his intention to vote either way—this seemed to surprise some gentlemen opposite; but to those who generally made up their minds upon all questions before they came into the house, it was to be expected they must be astonished that he had not made up his after he was in it. He was against giving any instructions to the committee relative to the payment of the debts; yet he would give it as his positive opinion that they ought to be paid immediately, for the dignity of the country, and the situation of the prince. He ought not to be seen rolling about the streets in his state-coach as an insolvent prodigal; but, while he ought to be relieved from his embarrassments, the public should not be burdened with the pressure of a hair, in affording him that relief. By coming at all to that house to pay his debts, the prince had been ill-advised; and he sincerely believed the king had not an honest minister about him, or else they never would have heard of such an application to parliament. The debts may and ought to be paid. If it is meant to keep monarchy respectable in the eyes of this country, and of the world, a different conduct should have been pursued. The sum of two or three hundred thousand pounds he reckoned trifling, when compared to the unbecoming situation of an heir apparent to the crown, without independence, and, what was worse, without character. In the course of those discussions, gentlemen had applied bold and strong language to that illustrious prince; but there were other high and illustrious characters, who, in future discussions, must be told as plainly what the public have a right to expect from them, and what their conduct ought to have been upon the present occasion, however ungracious the task may be.

*Mr. Pitt said he could not in point of propriety reply to the hon. gentleman's speech, nor did he mean it. This certainly was not the case, which the hon.*

*gentleman felt himself very much interested, though he had told the house he did not intend to vote upon it either way, because he had not made up his mind. He must take the liberty to say, that if the hon. gentleman had given his attendance to the former discussions on the subject, as he ought to have done, in his place, or even had he been earlier in his attendance that night, he would have heard enough to make up his mind upon.*

Mr. Sheridan said it was unnecessary for him to state to the house the reason which prevented his attendance, and were he to state them, they most probably would be unintelligible to that right hon. gentleman. His reason for giving no vote was, because he did not approve of the motion before the house; it was a measure confused and indirect.—When the positive question, “Whether the debts ought to be paid or not?” was before the house, he would have no hesitation in deciding.

*The house divided on the amendment; ayes 52; noes 126.—The house then divided on the original motion; ayes 242; noes 47.*

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JUNE 5.

## DEBTS OF THE PRINCE OF WALES.

*Mr. Pitt moved a resolution for making provision out of the consolidated fund, in the event of the demise of the Prince of Wales, for the liquidation of such debts as should then remain unpaid.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that as he found it impossible for him to vote a shilling, nay, the weight of a hair, of the public money, for the payment of the prince's debts, he must make his stand against that proposal; at the same time, he could not agree with the plans suggested by his hon. friend (Mr. Fox) for the sale of Cornwall, or the forest lands. Those plans he much disapproved of; and, indeed, it was evident the hon. gentleman had only proposed them from the embarrassing situation in which the house and the nation were thrown. The discussion of those debts was painful; but he would meet the question manfully, because the character of the heir apparent was intimately connected with the public fame; because his honour, his comfort, and his dignity, made part of the nation's wealth, and he was interwoven in the constitution of the country. He had no objection to the sale of the duchy of Cornwall, but he could not agree to have all the money arising from such sale applied to pay the prince's debts. The Duke of York had a contingent property, and all subsequent princes would be injured; but, if the duchy was sold, and an equivalent to the prince's life estate only applied, he felt himself so far from objecting, that he thought the



sale would be attended with many advantages. The greatest part of the value of the revenues were swallowed up in the collection ; it answered the purposes of jobbing and court influence. The duchy, though nominally of Cornwall, was ridiculously split and dispersed ; we have Cornwall in Coventry, in Lambeth, and in Westminster ; and, as a property, it could not be less beneficial or productive in any other shape or figure. The plan, however, which he should propose would be of a different nature ; but he assured the house that no consideration of paying his court to anybody had influenced him to devise it ; but to that he would more particularly come by and by. He would not wish to press on the civil list : he had always been an enemy to its being for life ; and had always held, that the real and true control of the purse would be, to vote the civil list annually ; then would the house constantly consider the exigencies, and give what should be found necessary. The house of commons would then have the means of withholding the salaries of ministers if they disapproved of their conduct, instead of the vain claim of withholding the supplies, which they knew they could not enforce without injuring the public service and distressing the public creditor. The commissioners to be appointed by the bill, ought to have the power of inquiring into the prince's right to the revenues of the duchy of Cornwall, during his minority. If his right should appear, and even if the money should have to be refunded by the public, the difference would be, that of the prince's being solvent or insolvent. In voting £125,000 a year for the prince's establishment, were not gentlemen conscious that they were voting £25,000 a year for the liquidation of debts, while they professed to be doing no such thing ? To vote more than £100,000 a year, was laying down the prodigal principle, that every future Prince of Wales, no matter under what circumstances, was to have an equal income with that now voted. The minister who proposed it was not consistent with himself ; for he had formerly thought £60,000 not only sufficient, but ample. Would any man contend that the prince's marriage called for an addition to his income of more than double ?—that the Princess of Wales, for whom, in case of the prince, £50,000 was thought sufficient for his establishment, would occasion an increase of the prince's establishment of £65,000 a year, might be thought to be

provided for in the first instance ; but he should oppose taking anything from the sinking fund, immediately or contingently, for that purpose, till he had taken the sense of the house upon a plan he meant to suggest. The minister would have consulted both the king's honour and his own, if, when the marriage of his Royal Highness was proposed, he had said that he would not bring down a message calling upon the house for money, unless his Majesty would set the example, and be the first to bear a part of the burden. Little delicacy had been observed with respect to the prince, and as little ought to be observed in representing the truth to his Majesty, which his ministers had neglected to lay before him. Was it honest, was it loyal, to keep lurking in their minds a disapprobation of his Majesty's conduct, without submitting to his consideration what they wished to do ? It was the duty of ministers to have done this in the first instance ; but, as they had not done so, it became the duty of parliament. Their advice intimated to the prince had produced an effect honourable to his character, and there was no reason to suppose that his Majesty would pay less attention to it. . If the worst of Jacobins had devised a plan for disgracing the Prince of Wales and dishonouring the crown, it would have been such a plan as ministers had brought forward. Were the expenses incurred by the prince so very unpardonable ? His Majesty possessed many great and good qualities ; but on the subject of expense, or of keeping promises with the public, would the prince suffer by comparison with his Majesty ?

*Mr. Pitt called to order.*

Mr. Sheridan said the right hon. gentleman listened with pleasure to the just praises bestowed upon his Majesty, because he took them all to himself. He did not mean to defraud him of the other part, for when he spoke of his Majesty's expenses, and breach of promise with the public, he imputed all the blame to his ministers. On his Majesty's accession the civil list was settled at £800,000 a year, which was then thought so ample that parliament was assured from the throne, that the civil list should not be suffered to run into arrear. Since that assurance, debts of the civil list had been paid to an amount which, at compound interest, would make nearly seven millions. The chancellor of the exchequer, in the early part of his administration, assured the house that no more debt should be suffered to accrue



upon the civil list, and soon after, in violation of his promise, and in violation of the act of parliament which directed that ministers should not receive their salaries till the other claims upon the civil list were discharged, called upon the house to pay a new debt. When an establishment for the Prince of Wales was first proposed, the Duke of Portland, now one of his Majesty's ministers, and his then colleagues in office, were of opinion that it ought to be £100,000. His Majesty thought otherwise, and it was settled at £50,000. He had, soon after, opportunities of seeing the prince's embarrassments from the narrowness of his income, and the feelings to which those embarrassments gave rise. Although holding no official situation about his royal highness, the prince honoured him with his confidence, and often asked his advice, chiefly from the knowledge of his fixed determination to accept of no obligation of any kind whatever. It was not his custom to answer calumnies, many of which he had suffered to pass unnoticed; but he now declared, in the face of the house and of the country, that he never received from the Prince of Wales so much as the present of a horse or of a picture. Lately he had seen his royal highness but seldom, from circumstances which, although it had always been his opinion that a Prince of Wales ought to adopt no party in politics, it was unnecessary to explain; but on that very account, he was the more desirous of doing justice to the prince, especially when he saw a disposition to place every part of his conduct in the most odious point of view. Let gentlemen recollect what was paid for the prince in 1787. It was £160,000; of this, £60,000 was for Carlton House, and £80,000 more was voted to complete the building. A suspicion arose, that this money was not applied to the purpose for which it was voted; but, upon investigation by a committee, it was found to be faithfully applied. Take all the money he had got from the date of his first establishment to the present day, and it would be found not to exceed £75,000 a year, £25,000 a year less than ministers originally thought his establishment ought to be. In 1787 a pledge was given to the house that no more debts should be contracted. By that pledge the prince was bound as much as if he had given it knowingly and voluntarily. To attempt any explanation of it now would be u of his honour, as if he had suffered it to be wrung with a view of afterwards pleading that it was again:

judgment, in order to get rid of it. He then advised the prince not to make any such promise, because it was not to be expected that he could himself enforce the detail of a system of economy ; and although he had men of honour and abilities about him, he was totally unprovided with men of business, adequate to such a task. The prince said he could not give such a pledge, and agree to take back his establishment. He (Mr. Sheridan) drew up a plan of retrenchment, which was approved of by the prince, and afterwards by his Majesty : and the prince told him that the promise was not to be insisted upon. In the king's message, however, the promise was inserted ; by whose advice he knew not. He heard it read with surprise, and being asked next day, by the prince, to contradict it in his place, he inquired whether the prince had seen the message before it was brought down. Being told that it had been read to him, but that he did not understand it as containing a promise, he declined contradicting it, and told the prince that he must abide by it, in whatever way it might have been obtained. By the plan then settled, ministers had a check upon the prince's expenditure, which they never exerted, nor enforced adherence to the plan. In so far ministers, and not the prince, were to blame. In the expenditure upon Carlton House, they were still more blameable, for, with complete authority, they had never interposed to stop the most extravagant and useless waste of money. By the bill, the house was declared a public work, and the money expended upon it to be put out of the power of the prince's creditors ; the public ought then to pay for it. While ministers never interfered to check expenses, of which they could not pretend ignorance, the prince had recourse to means for relieving himself from his embarrassments, which ultimately tended to increase them. It was attempted to raise a loan for him in foreign countries, a measure which he thought unconstitutional, and put a stop to ; and after a consultation with Lord Loughborough, all the bonds were burnt, although with a considerable loss to the prince. After that, another plan of retrenchment was proposed, upon which he had frequent consultations with Lord Thurlow, who gave the prince fair, open, and manly advice. That noble lord told the prince that, after the promise he had made, he must not think of applying to parliament ; that he must avoid being of any party in politics, but, above all, of exposing himself to the suspicion of



being influenced in political opinion by his embarrassments ; that the only course he could pursue with honour, was to retire from public life for a time, and appropriate the greater part of his income to the liquidation of his debts. This plan was agreed upon in the autumn of 1792. Why, it might be asked, was it not carried into effect ? About that period his royal highness began to receive unsolicited advice from another quarter. He was told by Lord Loughborough, both in words and in writing, that the plan favoured too much of the advice given to M. Egalite, and he could guess from what quarter it came. For his own part, he was then of opinion, that to have avoided meddling in the great political questions which were then coming to be discussed, and to have put his affairs in a train of adjustment, would have better become his high station, and tended more to secure public respect to it than the pageantry of state liveries.—[*Mr. Rolle called to order.*—After some pause, the house called to Mr. Sheridan to go on.—“ I am not surprised,” said Mr. Sheridan, “ at the hon. gentleman’s calling me to order ; I should have been surprised if he had given a reason for it.”—These plans were soon after given up ; which he could not enough lament, as by adopting them, his royal highness might have been, in point of popularity as in rank, the second man in the kingdom. By the plan now proposed, the prince has not the grace of suggesting either the retrenchments, or the checks upon his future conduct. His past misconduct was exhibited in the harshest point of view ; he was set in a gilded pillory ; sent to do public penance in an embroidered sheet. He was left in possession of too much income to exempt him from envy, and too little to exempt him from scorn. To pay the debts, something ought to be given by the king. There were debts due to honest tradesmen, to which no exception could be taken, and which ought not to be postponed to a distant period. There were on the establishment gentlemen of honour, whose salaries were fourteen quarters in arrear ; and to some of them it must be a great inconvenience not to be paid. The debts ought, therefore, to be divided into two parts, and those of the descriptions above-mentioned discharged immediately. Carlton House being now the property of the public for ever, the public ought to rebuild it. This would reduce the interest of this at five per cent.

For this he did not mean to apply to the civil list, which might now be almost considered as identified with the consolidated fund. In the last reign, the sum appropriated to the privy purse was £36,000 a year. In the beginning of the present, it was £48,000. In 1777, when the debts of the civil list were paid, and £100,000 a year added to it, the privy purse was made £60,000, and the queen received £50,000 for her establishment, all their Majesties' houses and villas were now finished, and they had no expenses to incur in the way of paraphernalia. The first and most natural feeling of a parent would be, to make some sacrifice to retrieve the imprudence of a son. He should therefore expect £10,000 a year from his Majesty's privy purse, and £5,000 a year from the queen's establishment; for the remaining £10,000 a year he would look to those places and sinecures, which neither added dignity to the crown, nor were calculated to afford it support. He would just instance the place of teller of the exchequer, which produces between £18,000 and £20,000 a year; and is thus indeed peculiarly circumstanced, and unhappily for this country, that it is the more productive as the burdens of the people increase; that he is rich in proportion as the people are poor; and certainly, from the public spirit of the marquis, he would make any sacrifice in a general arrangement which would be found to tend to public advantage. For the sinking fund he would not take away any gentleman's sinecure place, but appoint a committee as trustees, in whom might be placed the revenues of useful offices, which, after the death of the present holders, and as they fell, should be gradually applied to extinguish the principal. When they should be all paid off, it would be of service to our posterity, who would look back with exultation and gratitude for our arrangement, and will wonder that such places ever existed. This would be the way to make our constitution stable; to prevent the wild system of jacobinism undermining or overturning it. Whilst we are spilling our blood and wasting our treasure in support of theoretical systems of continental monarchy, this may be a rational resource, and prove that monarchy, or those employed under it, will show examples of self-denial, and do something for the benefit of the people. This would be to add lustre to the crown; unless, indeed, ministers may think that it shines with additional lustre in proportion to the gloom that surrounds it, and that a king is



magnificent as his subjects become miserable. For his part, he felt himself a staunch friend to the British constitution ; he surveyed it with a rational affection, but was no friend to its abuses. There was one class who loved our constitution, but did not love its abuses : a second class loved it with all its abuses ; and there was a third class—a large interested party, amongst which he placed his Majesty's ministers—who loved it for nothing else but its abuses. But let the house, the best part of our constitution, consider its own honour and character ; let all parties, as well those who were gorged with sinecure offices, as those who had none, have a contest who shall be most eager to destroy them. Let us, by such a measure as I call for (said Mr. Sheridan), build the ease and dignity of the prince on the ruins of idleness and corruption, and not by the toil of the industrious poor, who may think their loaf decreased by the payment of its incumbrances.

Mr. Sheridan concluded by moving an amendment to Mr. Pitt's motion, that after the words " consolidated fund," he added these words, " provided it shall appear to this house, upon due investigation into the subject, that they cannot be defrayed out of his Majesty's civil list, or out of sinecure offices and useless places paid by the public."

*Mr. Bastard recommended to Mr. Sheridan to withdraw his amendment.*

Mr. Sheridan said, he had no objection to withdraw his amendment, that the sense of the house might be taken on the main question ; but he should move it in a direct proposition afterwards.

*The house divided on the main question : ayes 148 ; noes 93.*

Mr. Sheridan then, with a short preface, moved " That a proposition having been made upon a message from the throne, to make a farther provision for his royal highness the Prince of Wales, it becomes the house to consider, whether this additional provision may not be made without laying any additional burden on the people, by the reduction of useless and inconvenient places."

*Mr. Pitt, without any observations on this motion, moved to adjourn.*

Mr. Sheridan said, it would be idle for him to make any comment on the indecency of moving to adjourn, without whether the people might not be eased. He in putting the question fairly to the house ;

said, that to desire the house to make this provision for the prince, by a reduction of useless places, would be to cheat themselves; he could not charge ministers with such folly.

*The house then divided on the motion to adjourn; ayes 153; noes 29; majority 124.*

JUNE 8.

DEBTS OF THE PRINCE OF WALES.

*Mr. Pitt proposed that 65,000*l.* should, in case of the demise of the Prince of Wales, be charged on the consolidated fund, to discharge such parts of his debts as might then remain unpaid. General Smith observed, that he was convinced the Prince of Wales was fairly, justly, and as legally entitled to the rents, issues, and profits of the duchy of Cornwall, as any other minor would be to the income of his estate in similar circumstances. He understood that commissioners would be appointed under the bill which was then before the house, and armed with authority to inquire into the prince's debt; he was therefore of opinion that a clause ought to be inserted in that bill, to enable these commissioners to inquire also into the claims of his royal highness, and that the sum or sums, great or small, that should be found owing to him, should be placed opposite to his debts. Mr. Pitt considered these remarks as entirely irrelevant to the question before the house.*

MR. SHERIDAN thought it was by no means irrelevant to the question before the committee; that question regarded the contingent discharge of the debts of his royal highness, and, however gentlemen might lament that those debts were contracted, they were now called upon for their advice with respect to the best mode of discharging them. And as he was one of those that had made up his mind upon this subject, that a single shilling of those debts should not fall on the public, he was ready to adopt that mode which would enable his highness to extricate himself in the most just and in the most honourable manner. The right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) said, that if it even should be found that the prince was entitled to the revenues of Cornwall, that it would not diminish the regret of gentlemen on the occasion; certainly it would be a matter of regret that the prince had contracted those debts imprudently and improvidently; but would the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) say that it would not place the prince in a very different point of view from that in which he stood at present? If the prince could say—"it is true I have, through the narrowness of my income, contracted debts to a large amount; I wish of all things to discharge them; but I am happy to have it in my power to discharge them out of my own reve-



nues, without calling on the public for a single shilling," would the right hon. gentleman have the confidence to assert that under such circumstances the prince would not stand in a very different light? But the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) says, this money has already gone into the pockets of the public; and if this was the case it would make no difference; it would make a great and material difference; it would satisfy the public if it had gone into their pockets, that they were only repaying the prince his own. Nay, it would satisfy them to know in what pocket it went, and surely that was the least they had a right to expect. The right hon. gentleman says again, this would call forth a balance betwixt the prince and the public, that, in all probability, would not be in his favour. What, the expense of his education? Surely not. As the son of the public, and the offspring of an amiable and illustrious prince, it was not to be conceived that any such account would be brought against his royal highness. The hon. baronet (M. W. Ridley) was apprehensive that, by bringing this question to issue, it might give birth to litigation betwixt the illustrious father and son, which he, in common with those that heard him, deprecated; he did not see but that might be avoided. Gentlemen had heard of amicable suits in chancery, and surely this might be put on the same issue. He was sorry he did not see the learned gentleman (the attorney-general) in his place, because, high as the legal opinion of that gentleman might be, he did not conceive it quite so conclusive on the subject of the duchy of Cornwall. That learned gentleman had quoted the case of Charles the First; but he ought to have recollected that Prince Henry was the *filius primo, genitus*, and that on the demise of that prince, Charles only held the duchy of Cornwall by grant from the king his father. That learned gentleman argued on a supposition that the Prince of Wales held by knight service, and in that case that the king was guardian in chivalry; this he denied; for it was plain that, by the act of Charles the Second, that part of the feudal system was abolished. Mr. Sheridan wished that a clause should be introduced in the bill for appointing commissioners to examine into the accounts of the duchy of Cornwall.

Mr. Sheridan wished the house to observe the different opinions that had been delivered by Mr. Pitt and Mr. An first had said that a suit at law might be institut had asserted that he would not advise his roya

tute any litigation. This difference of opinion was an additional and a strong reason why the house should come to a decisive vote upon the subject. The bill could not in its present state pass the house. It held up the prince in the degraded situation of a man whom the public were warned not to trust. Was it, therefore, matter of no importance whether the prince should continue for eight or nine years in such a situation, or whether he should pay his debts to-morrow with his own money? It had been said, would he vote for the income of £125,000 if he had supposed that the prince had a just claim upon the arrears of the duchy of Cornwall? To this he should reply that he certainly would not.

*Mr. Lambton asserted, that the house ought to look to the credit side of the prince's account as well as to the debt side.—Mr. Sumner suggested the possibility of the creditors of the Dukes of York and Clarence making a claim upon the Prince of Wales for the sum for which his royal highness was joint security.*

Mr. Sheridan said that this was a material circumstance. The debts of the Dukes of York and Clarence, it had been said, were in a train of liquidation, and therefore were not included in the account of the Prince of Wales's debts. But, though they were not included in the account, the house did not mean to extinguish the security which creditors of their royal highnesses possessed; and, besides, it ought to be remembered that the death of either the Duke of York, or the Duke of Clarence, was not an improbable event. In that case, the creditors would certainly come on the Prince of Wales.

*Mr. Pitt said, that the discussion would come with more propriety in the committee on the bill. The debts of the Dukes of York and Clarence were now put into such a state of liquidation, that their creditors would not be likely to form any demand upon the heir-apparent.*

Mr. Sheridan said, that he meant to take an opportunity, in another stage of the proceeding, to propose that mode of liquidating the debts which he considered as most consistent with the honour and dignity of the crown and the interests of the people; and he trusted, when he brought forward the proposition, that it would not be attempted to be got rid of by a motion for adjournment at two o'clock in the morning. He meant to move an address to his Majesty to require and implore his Majesty to grant some aid out of the civil list towards liquidating the debts; and also to propose to the house that some provision should be made out of the sinecure places for the same purpose. If the house



should negative the address, and refuse to entertain the discussion, he would then not consent to vote either the one sum or the other for the liquidation of the debt.

*The house divided ; ayes 93 ; noes 63.*

*Mr. Anstruther moved, " That it be an instruction to the committee that they have power to receive a clause for appropriating a certain annual sum out of the revenue of the duchy of Cornwall, towards the liquidation of the debts of his royal highness." Mr. Fox observed, that if the Duke of York inherited the estate by succession, he presumed that such an appropriation as was offered ought not to be secured against him.*

Mr. Sheridan objected upon the same principle as before. It ought to extend to the prince's own interest and no farther ; for if extended to the Duke of York, he said, although it was not probable but parliament would make ample provision in lieu of it, yet, as it was optional and dependent, it was extremely objectionable ; nor ought the Duke of York to come to parliament for relief on account of the prince's extravagance. In one point of view, it was objectionable to extend it any way without the consent of the Duke of York, the Duke of Clarence, and Prince Edward, since they had all an equal right in it ; and, therefore, the best mode would be to obtain their consent and dispose of the property at once, by which means a sum might be raised that would liquidate the whole, and £12,000 a-year might be set aside for the survivors, without any loss but patronage, which the house, he hoped, would consider as an advantage gained. He concluded, therefore, by proposing an amendment, " During such term as his Majesty or his royal highness continue to have an interest in the same estate."

*The question, with the amendment, were carried without a division.—The bill being subsequently read a second time, it was proposed to go into a committee of the whole house upon it, for which purpose it was moved, " That the Speaker do now leave the chair." Mr. Whitbread opposed the motion.*

Mr. Sheridan said that nothing had fallen from the chancellor of the exchequer which had in the least tended to alter his opinion, and that he could not give a silent vote on the question of the speaker's leaving the chair ; but must say that he thought the language used by his hon. friend who opposed it was extremely just and proper ; and that the present bill was in the highest degree degrading and disgraceful to the prince. He said that Pitt had grafted one plan upon another. He had, at first proposed to make the prince's establishment £100,000 a year, and to appropriate £25,000 to the payment of the debts ; and,

ing to this, he had formed an establishment for the prince's household ; since which he adopted Mr. Fox's plan of appropriating £65,000 a-year to the debts, and letting the prince live in retirement as a private nobleman ; but by this bill he was to be a private nobleman with a prince's establishment ; for, instead of the groom and the footman, the bill talked of his master of the horse and lord of the bedchamber. It was an heterogeneous mass—a variegated tissue, a hodge-podge of absurdity. He declared that he would not accede to any proposition for taking a single shilling out of the pockets of the public until he saw ministers set about the business in good earnest. By this he meant that the house ought not to resort to the people, but to those sinecure places which contributed neither to the support nor dignity of the crown. As these fell in, he should propose to form out of them a fund to discharge the interest, and finally to extinguish the prince's debts. He still cherished the idea, too, that the house would still have some assistance from the civil list, and from the duchy of Cornwall, the arrears of which had accumulated during the minority of his royal highness, and was a resource which would go a great way towards the extinction of the incumbrances. The crown lands ought also, on this emergency, to be called in aid, without any prejudice however to his Majesty ; these, he was sure, would be adequate to the purpose ; and he trusted that ministers would avail themselves of his suggestion, and suffer the burden to fall where it was likely to be least felt. Having argued on the general grounds, Mr. Sheridan proceeded to the special grounds. It had been stated by an hon. friend of his (Mr. Lambton) that his royal highness approved of the restrictions in the bill ; but this assertion he had so qualified in his explanation that little stress ought to be laid upon it. Was it not, he begged leave to ask, a degradation to put a person out of the reach of the law ? For his part he could not figure to himself anything so preposterous as to wish for an act of parliament to put a man into an ignominious situation, so restricted that he could not keep his word and do justice to tradesmen. If an heir apparent were so absurd as to solicit a law to fly from his word and bond, he had no hesitation of pronouncing such a man as unfit for reigning over an enlightened nation.

*Colonel Fullarton having replied to Mr. Sheridan :*

Mr. Sheridan said he never was a secret councillor to the Prince of Wales. He never gave him any advice in which he did not



wish it were possible for the king to stand on one side and the people of England on the other. He had stated what was true, that Lord Thurlow gave the prince wise advice in a manly manner, and that Lord Loughborough counteracted that advice. As to some parts of the speech of the hon. gentleman, some of the sentences he believed nobody understood; and he believed that somebody had advised him to prepare a speech against what he thought should be said to-night. He had ransacked the English language to find trite sayings, and had so obscured his language with metaphor, and embellished it with coarse daubing, as to render it totally unintelligible to meaner capacities. In answer to dark insinuations, he had only to say that he had never, during the long period he had enjoyed the confidence of his royal highness, accepted the slightest favour of his royal highness.

*A division took place; for the amendment, 157; against it, 36.*

*On the clause for charging the annuity of £65,000 upon the consolidated fund, Sir William Young moved that the words "civil list," should be inserted instead of "consolidated fund."*

Mr. Sheridan seconded the motion. He thought the committee would not discharge its duty if they did not try every means to discharge the debt, before they resorted to additional burdens on their constituents. It may be said that the civil list was inadequate. It should be tried whether the reduction of useless places, paid by that list, would not supply the necessary means.

Mr. Sheridan recommended the committee that the consolidated fund contained no unappropriated heap; and that, in fact, there was not a shilling in it from which this annuity could be paid, without imposing fresh burdens upon the people. A saving to that amount might be made in the civil list; at all events the experiment should be tried.

*Mr. Wilberforce supported the clause, and said, that the hon. gentleman should first have shown how these savings could be made from the civil list.*

Mr. Sheridan replied that, though the civil list had been thought incapable of retrenchment, it was certain, even when that opinion prevailed, that if a pinching exigency should come, retrenchment must be tried; and he thought it should be attempted when such a sum as the present was demanded. He would pay the prince's debts, but wished the money to come out of the civil list.

*The committee divided for the amendment 16; against it 149. The clause then put upon the clause as it originally stood, which was carried without*

JUNE 15.

## DEBTS OF THE PRINCE OF WALES.

*General Smith moved a clause empowering the commissioners to inquire into the amount of the revenue arising from the duchy of Cornwall during the minority of the prince, with the view of its being applicable to the liquidation of his debts.*

MR. SHERIDAN said that, from the mode of proceeding adopted by the house, the prince's character was implicated in the question, insomuch as it would decide whether or not he could pay his debts, and assume the splendour befitting his station in any reasonable time. His income he received originally, burdened with pensions to the amount of £8000 a year, and, deducting rent and taxes, the whole sum left him by the bill, even including the sum just voted for the privy purse of the princess, would not exceed £40,000 a year. To this sum he was to be restricted for ten years, obliged to dismiss gentlemen from his service, who, perhaps, had formed their dependence upon him, and unable to appropriate anything to benevolence or charity. The house were making themselves trustees for his whole property, and in that character they were bound in honour to inquire what money was due to him, as well as what debts he owed. As to the expenses of his royal highness's education, he said, the right hon. gentleman had exaggerated them, and had forgotten that the statements lay upon the table, delivered at a former period. According to them, from the 5th of January, 1770, to the 5th of January, 1777, the sum total amounted to £42,242; and, as to the pretence attempted to be established, that nearly that sum alone must have been expended in the education and establishment of his royal highness, exclusive of his royal brother, he could not see how any solid and rational argument could be substantiated upon it. He was at a loss to know why the Bishop of Osnaburg should come in like a rider upon the prince's learning, to pick up the dry crumbs of education. Unless the prince, therefore, swallowed three times as much Greek as his brother, and took up a larger portion of dancing, he could not tell why the half of that sum should not be attributed to the education of the Duke of York. Reckoning, however, £25,000 for the prince out of it, the receipts of the revenue of the duchy of Cornwall, during the



same interval, amounted to £95,450, so that the expenditure for the maintenance and education of his royal highness did not form a third part of his income. The £60,000 voted in 1783 was not voted for the prince, but generally in aid of the civil list, and the prince did not receive more than £20,000 of it. As to the other £160,000, which parliament granted in 1787, he had to repeat, what he before stated, that £80,000 of it was due for the rebuilding and furniture of Carlton House, which really was unfit for habitation. Since Carlton House, therefore, was to be considered as the property of the nation, or rather as the property of his Majesty, and disposable with all the furniture, perhaps, by him, to-morrow, he blamed the right hon. gentleman for including those sums in his account of the expenditure. On a fair calculation, it would be found that the prince had not received more than £100,000 over and above his regular income; and the revenue of the duchy of Cornwall, with interest, during his minority, would amount to £500,000. He did not see how the house could appoint commissioners to pay his debts, without looking into so large a sum due to him.

Mr. Sheridan afterwards observed, that it interested the character of the prince not to lay any additional burden on the public. If the arrears were fairly laid at the door of the civil list, he would answer the public should never be troubled on this subject.

*The house divided on General Smith's motion; ayes 40; noes 97.*

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JUNE 17.

AID TO MERCHANTS TRADING IN GRENADA AND  
ST. VINCENT'S.

*On the order of the day that the bill allowing a million and a half, to be raised on exchequer bills, for the purpose of aiding the credit of merchants trading in Grenada and St. Vincent's, should be read a second time, Mr. Fox observed, that the force sent to the West Indies had been inadequate; and, upon an investigation of facts, it would turn out that such was the opinion of the commanders-in-chief and the ministers:—and that if the house should not now be disposed to go into an inquiry, he begged, at least, that the object might not be considered as abandoned; and, he hoped there would be no obstacle to such an inquiry at a future period, on pretext of the time at which it was brought forward.—Mr. Dundas replied.*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that in one point only he agreed with the

right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas), that if a motion for inquiry was made, it would not be likely to succeed; and on this ground he supposed that the right hon. gentleman was so much inclined to deal in assertions. He remarked of the right hon. gentleman that, whenever he stood upon weak ground, where he was conscious of his incapacity to make a defence, that, instead of waiting for an attack, he immediately sallied forth to claim merit and challenge applause. Such was his conduct with respect to the system pursued by administration in the West Indies; which, among all the absurd and assailable measures adopted by them in the prosecution of the war, was the most weak and the most vulnerable. He asked, whether Sir Charles Grey, so far from receiving a reinforcement of twenty, ten, or five thousand men, had received even one man to retain possession of the islands which he had conquered? Instead of twenty, not above ten thousand men had been sent; not one of whom arrived in proper time. As to the assertion that Guadaloupe would not have been lost, had it not been for the death of General Dundas, he knew very little about it—not more than the right hon. gentleman by whom it was made. If the unfortunate consequences of the neglect shown with respect to the West Indies, should extend to our own possessions in that quarter, the crime and the blame would rest entirely with ministers. Mr. Sheridan then adverted to what he had said, on a former occasion, of the sickly condition of the troops detained on board the transports; which had then been controverted by ministers; though they afterwards had recourse to the expedient which he advised—of relanding several of the regiments, as unfit for the service for which they were destined.

*The bill was read a second time, and ordered to be committed on the day following.*

#### DEBTS OF THE PRINCE OF WALES.

*The order of the day for the third reading of a bill, granting an establishment to the Prince of Wales, was read.*

Mr. Sheridan said, he must oppose the bill both in its principle and its provisions, because it went to burden the public with taxes to the amount of £65,000; this he had said, again and again, was the effect of it, which he must now repeat. It was, therefore, objectionable to him, because he thought that the whole charge ought to fall on pensions, sinecures, and all the



trappings of the court, and also the arrears of the duchy of Cornwall. A learned gentleman had said, that nothing would be more expensive and absurd than the sale of the crown lands at this time, because the crown lands were in a state of improvement. He should be glad to know what the improvement was which that gentleman expected. He doubted very much whether the commissioners, who had examined the state of the crown-lands, would take the produce of the improvement as the reward of their labour. But if there was any improvement to be made, there could be no doubt but that would have its effect on the price which would be given. As to the question on the arrears of the duchy, he agreed with the hon. general entirely ;—that they ought to be accounted for to the prince, and that this question could not be set at rest by this bill. It was an unfortunate circumstance for his royal highness that his advisers thought so lightly of his claim. But, if he had his former advisers, who were hon. and learned gentlemen, he had no doubt but the claim would be made, for they were the friends of the prince ;—not less his friends, for being also the friends of the public. He then desired that the part of his Majesty's message to the house, relative to this business, which recommends that they would settle an establishment on the prince, be read : which being done, he proceeded to show that this measure was not an establishment for the prince suitable to his rank and dignity. He therefore, for one, should not consider this subject as closed, but open for discussion at any future time ; and he thought that sinecure places and pensions ought to be applied to the discharge of the incumbrances. He thought also that a sum of money ought to be raised immediately for the discharge of the debts ; for by the present plan the prince's name would appear indorsed on all his bills, for eight or nine years together. This was improper with regard to the creditors also, whom some gentlemen put together as a gang of robbers in a lump, but many of whom he believed to have fair and just claims upon his royal highness ;—these creditors were ill-treated by this measure ; they would lose four or five per cent. for discount of the debentures after their claims should be allowed ; so that, after all, the tradesmen would not have the whole of their demands settled. This point to which he could not help allude, he blamed the prince for making the establi

before he knew what parliament would think fit to grant him. Now he had reason to believe that his royal highness was encouraged in that idea by those in whom he thought he might trust; for he believed that the prince was assured his income should be at least £100,000 a year, clear of all deduction; instead of which, all the addition to his income was to go in payment of his debts—and that, too, a burden on the public. Thinking, therefore, that the public and the prince were equally ill-treated, Mr. Sheridan found himself bound to oppose this bill altogether.

*Mr. Anstruther begged leave to say a few words as to what had fallen from Mr. Sheridan, respecting himself. The hon. gentleman, he said, had seemed to accuse him of having given an opinion, as the law officer of the Prince of Wales, against the claim of the prince; this he denied to be the case. He had given no opinion upon the point. He had only said in the house, that he had not heard anything which could induce him to advise the prince to risk this claim. That royal personage had never asked him for his opinion on that head—whenever he did so, he his opinion good or bad, he would give it to the best of his knowledge and judgment. The hon. gentleman had said, that those who were the law officers of the prince before him, had given their decided opinion in favour of the prince's claim. It might be so, but he had never heard it before. It had been asked why he, as the law officer, had not advised the prince to assert this claim. He had said before, his opinion had never been asked by his royal highness; but why did not the learned gentleman who had been mentioned to have given their opinion, as it was so favourable to the claim, why did not they advise the prince to assert it? It was certainly as much their duty as it was his, especially as they had made up their minds decidedly in favour of it, and he had not.*

Mr. Sheridan was much surprised at what had just been said by the learned gentleman, as to his not having given an opinion on the subject of this claim. He said, as far as he was competent to judge of what was an opinion, he thought the learned gentleman had entered very much at large into the subject—had boasted that he had opportunities of greater and better information than most other members had;—that he had very much at large entered into the construction both of the letter and spirit of the statute of Edward III.—of the nature of the different feudal tenures by which it might be supposed to be guided and affected—of the case of Charles I. and the acts of Charles II.; and after descanting so much at large on the whole field of legal argument, applicable to the subject, the learned gentleman had said, that from all he had seen and read on the subject, “he



could not see anything that induced him to advise the prince to risk this claim." If this was not giving an opinion, Mr. Sheridan said, he was at a loss to know what was meant by an opinion; and if it was an opinion, as he contended it was, he felt but little hesitation in saying, that to his mind it appeared to be an opinion bearing pretty strongly against the claim of his royal highness.

The hon. gentleman had asked, "why the learned gentleman who had preceded him in office had not advised his royal highness to assert his claim?" The answer was extremely obvious. It would have been looked upon as an officious and a very invidious step in them to have given any such advice at that time, situated as the prince then was. It was very different now—that house were now acting as trustees for his royal highness, as well as for the public; and it behoved them to look seriously to what was due to him, as much as to what was due from him. He asserted that these arrears were, in his opinion, the prince's just right;—as such, they ought to be paid to him. If they had been paid to him before, he would venture to say, ministers would have had no occasion to come now to parliament for the payment of his debts. He was happy in being able to state to the house, that both the learned gentlemen he had alluded to were decidedly of opinion that these arrears of the duchy of Cornwall were due to the prince; and, he had no doubt, if they were now in the offices they formerly held under the prince, they would advise his royal highness immediately to assert his claim.

*The house divided—for the third reading, 54; against it, 10.*

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OCTOBER 29.

ADDRESS ON THE KING'S SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF THE  
SESSION.

*His Majesty opened the session with the following speech: "My lords and gentlemen, it is a great satisfaction to me to reflect that, notwithstanding the many events unfavourable to the common cause, the prospect resulting from the general situation of affairs has, in many important respects, been materially improved in the course of the present year. In Italy the threatened invasion of the French has been prevented; and they have been driven back from a considerable part of the line of coast which they had occupied: there is that the recent operations of the Austrian armies have checked they have made on the side of Germany, and frustrated which they were pursuing in that quarter. The success*

*their military operations in other parts of the campaign, and the advantages which they have derived from the conclusion of separate treaties with some of the powers who were engaged in the war, are far from compensating the evils which they experience from its continuance. The destruction of their commerce, the diminution of their maritime power, and the unparalleled embarrassment and distress of their internal situation, have produced the impression which was naturally to be expected; and a general sense appears to prevail throughout France, that the only relief from the increasing pressure of these difficulties must arise from the restoration of peace, and the establishment of some settled system of government. The distraction and anarchy which have so long prevailed in that country, have led to a crisis, of which it is as yet impossible to foresee the issue; but which must, in all human probability, produce consequences highly important to the interests of Europe. Should this crisis terminate in any order of things compatible with the tranquillity of other countries, and affording a reasonable expectation of security and permanence in any treaty which might be concluded, the appearance of a disposition to negotiate for general peace on just and suitable terms will not fail to be met, on my part, with an earnest desire to give it the fullest and speediest effect. But I am persuaded you will agree with me, that nothing is so likely to ensure and accelerate this desirable end as to show that we are prepared for either alternative, and are determined to prosecute the war with the utmost energy and vigour until we have the means of concluding, in conjunction with our allies, such a peace as the justice of our cause and the situation of the enemy may entitle us to expect. With this view I am continuing to make the greatest exertions for maintaining and improving our naval superiority, and for carrying on active and vigorous operations in the West Indies, in order to secure and extend the advantages which we have gained in that quarter, and which are so nearly connected with our commercial resources and maritime strength. I rely with full confidence on the continuance of your firm and zealous support—on the uniform bravery of my fleets and armies—and on the fortitude, perseverance, and public spirit of all ranks of my people. The acts of hostility committed by the United Provinces, under the influence and control of France, have obliged me to treat them as in a state of war with this country. The fleet which I have employed in the North Seas has received the most cordial and active assistance from the naval force furnished by the Empress of Russia, and has been enabled effectually to check the operations of the enemy in that quarter. I have concluded engagements of defensive alliance with the two imperial courts; and the ratifications of the treaty of commerce with the United States of America, which I announced to you last year, have now been exchanged. I have directed copies of these treaties to be laid before you.*

*“Gentlemen of the house of commons: it is matter of deep concern to me that the exigencies of the public service will require further additions to the heavy burdens which have been unavoidably imposed on my people. I trust that their pressure will, in some degree, be alleviated by the flourishing state of our commerce and manufactures, and that our expenses, though necessarily great in their amount, will, under the actual circumstances of the war, admit of considerable diminution in comparison with those of the present year.*

*“My lords and gentlemen: I have observed for some time past with the greatest*



*anxiety, the very high price of grain, and that anxiety is increased by the apprehension that the produce of the wheat harvest, in the present year, may not have been such as effectually to relieve my people from the difficulties with which they have had to contend. The spirit of order and submission to the laws which, with very few exceptions, has manifested itself under this severe pressure, will, I am sure, be felt by you as an additional incentive to apply yourselves with the utmost diligence to the considerations of such measures as may tend to alleviate the present distress, and to prevent, as far as possible, the renewal of similar embarrassments in future. Nothing has been omitted on my part that appeared likely to contribute to this end; and you may be assured of my hearty concurrence in whatever regulations the wisdom of parliament may adopt on a subject so peculiarly interesting to my people, whose welfare will ever be the object nearest my heart."*

*The Earl of Dalkeith moved the usual address, and was seconded by the Hon. Robert Stewart, afterwards Lord Castlereagh.*

MR. SHERIDAN rose, and began by stating that it was not his intention to have risen so early to deliver his opinion; but, observing that not a single gentleman evinced a wish to speak, he could not prevail upon himself to remain silent. Indeed he was not surprised at the dumb astonishment with which the speech had been heard: for if ever there was a speech calculated to excite astonishment and surprise, it was the present. He would venture to say, if any person could have previously known the speech, and had written to any part of England or Scotland, they would not have found a single man who would not have been surprised at the first noun substantive in the speech being "satisfaction," or at that substantive being used in any other part of the speech. It was said to be the mark of a resigned and religious temper, to be easily satisfied. If that were true, there never were ministers of more meek and primitive piety than the present; for what they had been satisfied by he knew not. Had the mover or seconder of the address told the house? Our situation had, it was asserted, experienced considerable improvement since last year. The first improvement was on the side of Italy; but it was not remembered that, at the period alluded to, the republicans had not penetrated into Italy! The second consisted in a report of a check which the French had experienced on the other side of the Rhine! He wished it might prove true; but, at present, he believed it rested on no better authority than a French newspaper! The army of the Rhine, however, had not last year crossed the Rhine; and now they were only prevented from advancing to the Danube, and obliged to limit their

progress to the German side of the Rhine, where they were likely to spend the winter. Had any improvement occurred with respect to the situation of this country with Holland? The Dutch were in perfect alliance with France; and England was at war with Holland. Last year Prussia had been an ally of Great Britain; yet, though his Prussian Majesty had departed from the alliance, the rest of the allies would, it was maintained, prove steady to the cause. What had been the fact? Spain had been lost to the coalition. Was this an improvement in the situation of the country? Last year several islands had been conquered in the West Indies. This year the situation of the country had been improved by the loss of two, and by the imminent danger in which the rest were involved. Had the situation of the country at home been improved? Last year the minister had treated with scorn the idea of a scarcity of grain; yet now, the people were informed in the speech from the throne, that there was a prospect of another famine, not less severe than the last; and this was to be considered as an improvement. He was really surprised how ministers could have the front to put such words into the mouth of his Majesty; and that they could suffer the king, when he passed through his starving and oppressed—and sorry was he to hear—irritated and clamorous people, to come down to the house and express his satisfaction.

If the prospect of peace was near, some compensation would be made for those evils; but gentlemen still clung, he said, to their old system. By a reference to the speech of the year before last, he found his Majesty had said, "peace could alone be obtained by a successful termination of the contest." Was the country now, he would ask, in the course of a successful termination of the contest, or, since that period, have we met with anything but disgrace and defeat? How different from what is laid down in that speech, is the argument of the gentleman who seconded the address. He says, "the more the French conquer, the more they increase their internal distress, and from that distress are we to look forward to a better order of things." In the speech of last session his Majesty held out some hopes of peace, which he was afraid could not be drawn from the present; he there says, "that it is impossible to contemplate the present state of affairs, without indulging a hope that they must produce a government capable of maintaining the accustomed relations of peace and



amity with other powers." In the present speech his Majesty only states, that "the distraction and anarchy which have so long prevailed in that country, have led to a crisis of which it is impossible as yet to foresee the issue." A very just cause of satisfaction truly! that is as much as to say, it is impossible to see any benefit that may arise from this crisis; but it is to produce consequences that will be important to the interests of Europe. When these consequences are to arrive, and what they are to be, we know not; but they are in spirit a little stolen from Partridge's almanack; the predictions in which are, "that the next year will produce most important events, of which all those who are then alive will be witnesses." In this speech, then, there is not any well-founded ground for the hope of peace; and we are now exactly in the same state as when his Majesty delivered his most gracious speech of last year, *minus* the hope of peace. "If," said Mr. Sheridan, "I were to judge of his Majesty's speech according to the letter of our constitution, as coming from the king himself, and not in fact, and according to the spirit of that constitution, as the speech of the minister, I think it contains a rational source of satisfaction, to his Majesty individually. As Elector of Hanover, he certainly did right to make peace in that capacity; and if he could have the same feelings and opinions about Great Britain, and consult the same advisers, it would afford matter of joy to everybody. I have often heard," said Mr. Sheridan, "of a considerable degree of jealousy being entertained by the people of Great Britain, when the king has brought into this country his Hanoverian troops; I would therefore humbly propose that his Majesty may keep his troops at home, but instead thereof, import some of his Hanoverian councillors, and send his British ministers to Hanover; and the people of this country, so far from entertaining a jealousy on that occasion, would pour forth a profusion of acknowledgments, and surround his throne with blessings for the change of his advisers." In another part of his Majesty's speech he mentions the co-operations of the just, benevolent, and pious Empress of Russia; this certainly is a source of great satisfaction; she has most generously furnished us with a fleet to protect our coast, to consume English provisions, and to learn British discipline. With regard to our prospect of important consequences to arise from the crisis in France; these important consequences, it seems, are to be deri-

out of their distresses. Not that they are likely to become better citizens, better christians, more humane or more enlightened, but from their present bad system, we may look to a change, and the establishment of good government from their distresses. That good government should rise out of distress, was a kind of hope which he applauded; and he wished the reasoning were extended to England. For surely, if from great distresses good government should arise, the people of England were in the high road of having a good government. The next cause of satisfaction, was the prospect of the successes likely to happen in the West Indies. Hitherto there has been no cause of satisfaction in that quarter; and if he was to put his finger on the most disgraceful of the dark catalogue of defects in the conduct of ministers during the present war, he could not find any more conspicuous than those which regard the West Indies. An hon. gentleman had mentioned it to the praise of ministers, that they did not bind themselves by specific declarations, nor had they any particular view. This, indeed, was strange praise; but if it was praise, he joined in it, and was ready to confess that he never knew the right hon. gentleman pledged to any one fixed principle. In the commerce of the world that man was generally—but perhaps mistakenly—reputed worthy of confidence, who stuck to plain dealing, and who declared his objects, and acted upon them with consistency and perseverance.

In ministerial honesty different principles were adopted; their conduct was veering with every change of circumstance; in it we beheld a perpetual series of compromises and objects, perpetually changing, but never could we perceive a grand, open, or undisguised plan. Individual members of administration had distinct and favourite plans. One minister had the little tinsel bauble of Corsica glittering in his eyes. An hon. secretary of state, he meant of the war, not of the sinecure department, had boasted that the expedition to the West Indies was a favourite. This hon. gentleman was no knight-errant; he was one of those who wished to obtain some valuable acquisition, and had no objection to lay hold of an island to swell the number of our colonies. A young man (Mr. Jenkinson), more sanguine in the cause of the emigrants and of monarchy, proposed to march instantly to Paris. He wished to strike at the heart of the republic, while the allies only struck at the extremity. He



would have fastened on the core, they only nibbled at the rind. Instead of assailing the capital, they only braved the dangers of Normoutier and Poitou. It was this policy which produced the wretched and miserable expedition to Quiberon; which, however deep it may strike into the heart of sensibility, seems by no means to have made a deep impression on the minds of ministers—if it had, they could never have placed “satisfaction” the fifth word in his Majesty’s speech; it was true, the blood of French emigrants only had flowed, it was not British blood which had been spilt, but it was British honour that bled at every vein. If all these improvements, continued Mr. Sheridan, were not sufficient to give the people of Great Britain satisfaction, the flattering prospect is held out of great conquests and indemnification in the West-Indies. That there was a great preparation was true, but the public wished to know why the expedition had not sailed six weeks ago; the delay was a great act of criminality in ministers; how much would that criminality be increased, when he informed the house that there was every probability that the fleet would not sail for a fortnight or three weeks longer; and at the present time, what was there not to be feared for our situation in these islands, in which there was not at that moment the complement of one full regiment of effective men? There were, indeed, the remains of six regiments of infantry, part of a regiment of light dragoons, and some artillery; but they did not altogether amount to the number of one full regiment. When, amid the gloom that surrounded us, we were to look, as a bright prospect, to our hope of success in the West Indies, he confessed himself dejected and dismayed. It would require a drain of men to insure success, which it would be impossible for this country to support. If 15,000 men should be sent against St. Domingo, and with that number we should be able to conquer the French part of that island, how many more would be necessary to effect the conquest of the Spanish part, not yet ceded to the French? and should we conquer all, what great and increased reinforcements would it be necessary to send to a country where, in addition to the opposition of an active, vigorous, and subtle foe, our armies would have to encounter more perils from the elements than from the enemy. The mortality in Grenada was alarming indeed; out of one regiment 14 officers and near 400 men died from April to

August last ; nor had the sick and wounded in those islands necessary assistance. Men were sent into the hospital of St. Pierre, in Martinique, without medicine or attendance ; and those who were so ill, that to continue in the climate would be certain death (and many of whom had lost a limb in the service of their country), could not procure transports to bring them home ; 90 or 100 were stowed, without sufficient accommodation, into the *Supply* transport ; nay, in one instance, in consequence of some dispute, many of our maimed and sickly countrymen were re-landed on one of the islands, and thus, from a criminal and murderous neglect, left upon the beach and abandoned to certain death. Could satisfaction arise to a good mind from the contemplation of such mortality ? Were our hopes to be enlivened by the vain and illusory visions of conquests in that charnel-house—the tombs of British soldiers ? Was this the cheering prospect held up to us—to behold our countrymen perishing under the fatal diseases of a pestilential climate ? Would it not be a matter of more humane satisfaction to avert these calamities ? Would it not be better to seize the first opportunity of negotiating for peace ? “ We, on our side of the house,” continued Mr. Sheridan, “ have told you before, to do as the King of Prussia has done ; find out what government the French armies obey, under whose command and control they achieve such brilliant victories, and negotiate with them ; we have told you to do as Spain has done ; we now tell you to do as the Elector of Hanover has done.” Mr. Sheridan next adverted to the declaration of Louis XVIII. He had suspicions in his mind, that it was the intention of ministers to act up to the spirit of this declaration, and to establish, if possible, the old unqualified system of despotism in France. Against such an object he must make his stand, as far as it could avail. To the support or increase of the naval force for the defence of Great Britain and her commerce, he would willingly give his hearty support, but to establish the dominion of Louis XVIII., he would not give a shilling of his constituents’ money. If it were true, as it was suspected, that the heads of that proclamation were penned in this country, with the concurrence and under the direction of ministers ; and that, in conjunction with Louis XVIII., they wished to advise his Majesty to exhaust the treasures and spill the blood of the country to restore the ancient



tyranny of the French monarchy, they deserved to lose their heads. This he had before roundly asserted, and he would now repeat it ; in his mind, the minister who advised Charles II. to enter into the pay of France, was not a greater traitor to his country than our present minister, if he had acted as was strongly suspected. Why were the race of Stuarts expelled from this country, but because they entered into a league with France ? and could any league be more destructive to this country than one with the house of Bourbon, who had been the uniform and inveterate enemies of Great Britain, its liberty, and its commerce ? No association with the republic could be so destructive to our interest ; for never were there worse neighbours on earth than the French during their monarchies. It was certainly possible that the conclusions which he had made in his own mind might be erroneous, but, as far as he could judge of the spirit of their intentions, from the prevarication of ministers, he believed that they were simply watching for an opportunity of effecting a counter-revolution for the establishment of monarchy, and placing Louis upon his throne. This he believed to be the real view of ministers ; and however other pretences might be made use of to delude the people, or satisfy the qualms of some scrupulous adherents, he could not but think that such was the true cause of delaying the restoration of peace to these kingdoms. Mr. Sheridan concluded by saying, that he would not move any amendment to an address which he disapproved of *in toto* ; however, if any gentleman should propose an amendment, which would embrace three plain points, he would have no objection to vote for it—first, “ That we could no longer burden our constituents with taxes to support the delusive and unattainable views of ministers in the restoration of monarchy, or until some form of government should be established in France, which they may not imagine to be incapable of maintaining the accustomed relations of amity and peace.” Secondly, “ That a strict inquiry should be instituted into the conduct of ministers in the prosecution of the war, and into the causes of the unexampled calamities which had befallen the country.” Lastly, “ That his Majesty should be entreated to take such measures as might lead to the speedy restoration of peace.”

*In the subsequent part of the debate,*

Mr. Sheridan explained, that the right hon. gentleman (Mr.

Pitt) by quibbling on the word "government," in a comment on one of his passages, had implied that he was desirous to adopt a new constitution. He knew not upon what principle it was that the right hon. gentleman imagined the existence of his administration, and the existence of the constitution, to be the same thing. Mr. Sheridan entertained such opposite ideas, that he looked upon the total annihilation of the right hon. gentleman's authority to be the happiest thing that could possibly happen to the constitution of this country.

*The house divided—for the address 140; against it 59.*

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NOVEMBER 9.

TREASON AND SEDITION BILLS.

*A report had been spread that an immense multitude of discontented persons had agreed to take the opportunity of the king going to the house of peers, on the 29th of October, to manifest their sentiments to his Majesty in person. This, of course, excited the curiosity of the public, and the park was on that day crowded in a manner unprecedented since the king's accession to the throne. In his way to the house of lords, which lay through the park, his coach was surrounded on every side by persons of all descriptions, demanding peace, and the dismissal of Mr. Pitt. Some voices were even heard exclaiming,—“no king,” and stones were thrown at the state coach as it drew near to the Horse Guards. In passing through Palace-yard, one of the windows was broken, it was said, by a bullet discharged from an air-gun. These outrages were repeated on the king's return from the house, and he narrowly escaped the fury of the populace in his way back from St. James's Palace to Buckingham House. On the 31st of October a proclamation was issued, offering a thousand pounds for the discovery of any person guilty of those outrages. On the 4th of November it was followed by another, wherein it was said, that previously to the opening of parliament multitudes had been called together by hand-bills and advertisements, who met in the vicinity of the metropolis, where inflammatory speeches were made, and divers means used to sow discontent and excite seditious proceedings. These meetings and discourses were followed three days after by the most daring insults to the king, by which his person had been imminently endangered. Rumours had also been spread, that assemblies were to be held by disaffected people for illegal purposes. In consequence of those proceedings, it was enjoined by the proclamation to all magistrates, and well-affected subjects, to exert themselves in preventing and suppressing all unlawful meetings, and the dissemination of seditious writings. So great had been the alarm and indignation created by the treatment of the king, that as soon as he had gone through the reading of his speech, and had left the house, it was immediately ordered to be cleared of all strangers, and a consultation was held by the lords, in what manner to proceed upon so extraordinary an occasion. An address to the king was resolved upon, and a conference with the*



*house of commons to request their concurrence thereon. The majority agreed to this measure; but the Marquis of Lansdowne accused the ministers of intending to seize this opportunity to work upon the passions and fears of the people, and to lead their representatives into concessions derogatory to the public liberty, and debasing to their character, in order to confirm their own power at the expense of the constitution. A conference with the commons was held accordingly in the course of the day, and witnesses were examined, in relation to the outrages committed. Their evidence was communicated to the commons, and both houses unanimously concurred in the addresses proposed. On the 6th of November Lord Grenville brought forward a bill for better securing the king's person and government against treasonable and seditious practices and attempts; and on the 9th of November Mr. Pitt moved in the house of commons for leave to bring in a similar bill.*

MR. SHERIDAN rose and said, I must own that I have heard with more concern than surprise the speech of the hon. gentleman (Mr. Wilberforce) who has just now sat down. I did indeed hope and believe, that in consequence of the warmth and indignation testified by my right hon. friend (Mr. Fox) which to me were not the least recommendations of his speech on the present occasion, that deep shame had struck the friends and associates of the right hon. gentleman dumb. [*A cry of "hear, hear."*] Perhaps it may be conceived to have been unreasonable in me to have cherished such an expectation, or to have supposed that shame could have any influence in that quarter. But I argued well from their silence; I perceived something like shame in their countenances, and I was in hopes that contrition might follow. When the hon. gentleman rose, I still cherished the hope, notwithstanding repeated disappointments, that there had at last been found a measure of his right hon. friend too strong, even for him to approve. But I now find that, in supporting a measure which violates the fundamental principle of the bill of rights—the right of petitioning—the hon. gentleman consoles himself with the reflection that he is only doing his part to transmit to posterity the liberty we have derived from our ancestors. The hon. gentleman has discovered, that a regular conspiracy has been, for some years, going on against the constitution of the country. I do most firmly believe this to be the case; though, perhaps, I differ with him as to the quarter from which this conspiracy originates. The hon. gentleman has discovered that a spirit of sedition and disaffection to the government has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished. If this spirit exists at present, more than it has done since the

commencement of the war, ministers have put a direct lie in the mouth of his Majesty, who, in his speech at the opening of the session, stated the spirit of order and submission to the laws, which had manifested itself among his faithful subjects. Were ministers then prepared to support the suspension of the habeas corpus act? What was their argument on the first day of the session? They contended, that one of the blessed effects of the French war was, that it had almost completely eradicated French principles. Now it was found that the danger from those principles was so much increased in proportion to the increasing pressure which the war had brought upon the country, the inconvenience already felt from scarcity, and the apprehensions of approaching famine, that it was necessary for ministers to resort to such desperate measures of precaution, as had never before been attempted. The hon. gentleman affirms those clubs and societies, which it is now the object to suppress, to be of recent origin; and asks, what were the liberties of the country, now supposed to be so much endangered, before their institution? These clubs and societies have existed in the country ever since the revolution. Of many of them, since the period of the American war, the hon. gentleman has himself been an active and distinguished member. And here I have occasion to regret that the hon. gentleman should be troubled with that shortness of memory which is incidental, in common with himself, to all the friends of the right hon. chancellor of the exchequer. In consequence of this defect, it is necessary for me to remind him of the active part he took in his opposition to the India bill; of his spirited, though unfortunate exertions for the abolition of the slave trade; and of his former support, in conjunction with his right hon. friend, to the cause of parliamentary reform. I asked him whether, upon all these occasions, he would have gone on so triumphantly in his societies, or among his constituents, with a justice of peace at his elbow? My only consolation with respect to the proposed bill is, that its excessive folly and consummate absurdity are such as must defeat itself, and, like other measures of ministers, I have no doubt that, after a few efforts, in consequence of being found untenable, it will be regularly abandoned. A worthy magistrate (Mr. Lushington) took offence at being charged with an attack on the rights of juries. He defended, with great eloquence and animation, the right of



posterity to improve upon the wisdom of their ancestors, and to adopt such improvements upon ancient institutions as their own better judgment may suggest. In consequence of this exertion of his eloquence, he will, doubtless, receive the thanks of the next meeting at Copenhagen House. Such an exertion, no doubt, might naturally have been expected in such a cause, when I recollect that the worthy alderman has himself been an active reformer, and, if there be no offence in the title, a friend of the people. If he still retains a seat in the society, we shall have this advantage, that under the operation of the present bill, he may attend our meetings as a magistrate as well as a member; and, from this circumstance, we shall have considerable reason to regret if the worthy alderman has withdrawn himself from our society. An hon. baronet (Sir Wm. Pulteney) treated the subject with a degree of levity not at all consistent with the usual gravity of his manner. He seems to think that all the danger at popular meetings arises from the circumstance, that the speakers state only one side of the question; so that we must conceive the business of the magistrates to be—not to take up the people, but to take up the argument. In this case, where are we to find those able magistrates and clever speakers who are to attend all the meetings, to correct mis-statements, and supply the deficiency of information? In Westminster—the headquarters of these seditious assemblies—the magistrates are the hired creatures and agents of ministers, a despicable set of paid, pensioned place-hunters; neither capable to communicate information nor to attend with impartiality. By the by, he was reminded how violently the present secretary at war had opposed the bill for throwing the magistracy into the hands of such a set of men, and with what terms of contempt he had then treated their character. In order to qualify those magistrates for the task which the worthy baronet has assigned them, it will first be necessary to give them integrity; secondly, independence; and, lastly, ability to detect misrepresentation, and refute unfounded arguments, the consequence of all which must be, to take from them the only thing which they now possess, namely, their salaries. But the magistrates, it seems, are to attend, accompanied by their constables. In this case fair argument had but little chance. If a speaker, when interrupted by the magistr

“ You have not heard me out, allow me to explain ”

the magistrate did not choose that he should proceed, the riot act was immediately read, the constables interfered, and the meeting was forcibly dissolved: and this was what gentlemen called, "setting a man to rights," that is to say, "knocking him down." Upon my word, such nonsense can scarcely be made a subject of serious argument. As it is the nature of man always to resist oppression, how many magistrates will be wanted, in order to carry into effect this new system? Will it be necessary, as to the disgrace of the service it was with respect to surgeons' mates for the army, to advertise, "Wanted a number of magistrates," &c.? I now speak in the hearing of a number of respectable gentlemen who serve as justices of the peace, not one of whom, I am confident, if the present bill shall pass, will be disposed to act in that capacity, as the pensioned spy of ministers. Mr. Sheridan stated that, with regard to the assault upon his Majesty, he was totally ignorant of it on the evening it happened, and when he entered that house, had heard nothing of it except some indistinct clamours. He wished to explain this circumstance, because the expressions he had made use of on the occasion had afforded matter of comment to some gentlemen, who were desirous to misrepresent his sentiments. He had seen in a newspaper that day, a thing said to be the heads of a bill introduced to parliament; he did not believe it: because of all that he had ever seen or read, nothing appeared to him so gross and scandalous a libel; he could not credit it to be the production of a sane man; but much less of any man who would dare to impute improper motives to the meeting at Copenhagen House; to that meeting he had never heard any solid charge laid; no riot, no disturbance; all was peaceable, sober, and consistent with the principles of the constitution; how then are we to account for the operations of the minister, but in his disappointment? he hoped for tumult, and peace disappointed his views. But there was another way of accounting for the minister's vindictiveness; the system of terror which reigned last year died with the trials; it might now be wished to revive it; and instead of the connection which had been attempted to be made out between the proceedings at Copenhagen House, and the outrage on his Majesty, that outrage might probably be traced to some one of that army of spies, who having been thrown out of employ in consequence of plots being discredited, and the suspension of the habeas



corpus repealed, might be desirous to revive the profitable trade of alarm, and might think too, that he did a thing not ungrateful to ministers, by affording them a plausible pretext to destroy the liberties of the country. From the general distrust which he had of every fresh attempt to create alarm, he was led to conclude, that if the minister was to follow up the inquiry, with respect to the authors of the outrage, it would end in the execution of one of his own spies. He concluded with an apostrophe to the speaker, who, he hoped, would imitate many of his virtuous predecessors, by treating the proffered bill—should it be attempted to be brought before the house—with the indignant resentment which it merited, as an insult to the dignity of the house, and not even suffering it to be read. For my part, said Mr. Sheridan, if this bill shall pass, I shall think myself unworthy to continue longer the prattling representative of a dumb and enslaved people, and I shall consider this house as unworthy that exception which secures to them that freedom of discussion which they will then have so justly forfeited.

*The house divided on the motion for leave to bring in the bill—ayes 214; noes 42.*

*Mr. Fox then moved, "That the house be called over this day fortnight." Mr. Dundas said that he would not oppose the call, though, in general, he thought a call of the house either nugatory or harassing; but, in this particular instance, it might be proper, for he was willing to own, that unless it was obvious that this bill had the concurrence of the majority of the people of England, it ought not to be passed into a law. That it would be found to have such concurrence he had no doubt, for he had been besieged in his office for months past, with applications for such a bill; and it was by the advice of a number of gentlemen that ministers had at length brought it forward.*

Mr. Sheridan said, that this attempt to conceal the authors of the bill was an acknowledgment on their own parts of its dangerous tendency; they wished to make it doubtful from whence it came. He had no doubt, but that if time was given, the hon. gentleman would find the opinion of the public very loudly and very pointedly expressed against a bill which struck at the foundation of British liberty; a bill which was called for by no circumstances, except what, he believed, ministers called the providential outrage on his Majesty.

Mr. Sheridan thought it necessary to declare, that he should not content himself with opposing the principle; he should op-

pose the bill in every stage of the committee, as well as out of it; and in the detail as well as in the principle.

*The call of the house was agreed to.*

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NOVEMBER 12.

TREASON AND SEDITION BILLS.

*Mr. Pitt moved the first reading of this bill.*

MR. SHERIDAN said that the hon. gentleman (Mr. Canning) who argued so logically on this pretended connection, had by no means convinced his mind that it was to be traced; the connection which he had to look for on the occasion, was one of which he had also a doubt, he meant the connection between the hon. gentleman's assertions and the fact, when he said that the meeting preached up the doctrine of king-killing. That some scandalous hand-bills might have been circulated he did not doubt; but he believed they were manufactured and fabricated by the spies and informers of government. In this conjecture, he was justified by the former practices of ministers, proved in the face of the country. Did it not appear by the confession of the wretches themselves on the state trials, that in public meetings they had been clamorous and indecent—that they had purposely used the most seditious expressions? and this they accounted for by saying that they did so that their real views in attending these meetings should not be suspected. Thus it appeared, that the only traitorous and seditious persons were those who were daily paid by his Majesty's ministers. Was there not the strongest probability that the writers of these hand-bills were paid and supported by the treasury? He had read in the newspapers the proceedings of that meeting, and he did not think they were either treasonable or seditious; if they were, the existing laws were sufficient to punish the guilty persons; and they ought to be punished. Would ministers pretend, that if seditious or treasonable speeches were uttered, they could not have procured evidence that would have brought the charges home to the individuals who had uttered them? The meeting was neither in a private room nor inaccessible; and would ministers have the front to pretend that they had not spies by these pulpits to hear, and faithfully to record, what passed? If sedition was there preached, ministers incurred the charge of supine-



ness and criminal neglect in not bringing the offenders to justice. Their not making any such attempt was a convincing proof to him, that the speeches had nothing of treason or sedition in them. In order that the house might be acquainted with the actual state of the country, Mr. Sheridan then gave notice that he would, on Monday next, move for a committee to inquire into the necessity of such a measure, and whether this spirit of sedition did or did not exist. This he thought it his duty to do, on account of the manner in which ministers had treated the subject.—They had asserted, in the king's speech, that almost all discontent was put an end to, and now they alleged it was so great as to make more rigorous measures necessary than any that have been proposed since the revolution. He believed, indeed, that ministers endeavoured to impose on the public in this, as they had done on a former occasion.

*Mr. Alderman Anderson decidedly approved of the bill, though he was utterly unacquainted with its contents, having but just come to town. He entertained the greatest dread of the seditious meetings which had been held, and thought some strong measure necessary to counteract them. He was convinced that a great majority of his constituents were actuated by the same sentiment, upon similar principles. Desperate acts, the worthy alderman observed, required desperate remedies. As he was coming to town from Hampstead, this afternoon, he was surprised to see such a number of people on the road; and, on inquiring the cause, he was informed at a turnpike-gate, that 30,000 people had assembled at Copenhagen House, for the purpose of seditious communication. He was also a great deal struck with one part of the information which he had received, that Mr. Thelwall, and some of the leaders of the meeting, were very much disappointed at not having got a phaeton of a certain noble duke, from which they intended to harangue the people.*

*The alderman being called upon to name the noble duke alluded to in his speech, rose, and said a few words about the right of members to state such circumstances as might be connected with the question.*

Mr. Sheridan said, the question came to this, that the worthy alderman, by observing silence, had seemed to persevere in his belief of the story he had told. He was surprised the Duke of Bedford should be held out as countenancing any meetings which were deemed licentious, when he saw that respected name subscribed publicly to a paper which would confer immortal honour on his character, and was intended to encourage an universal and decided opposition to the present bill. It was indeed a story which was fit for old wives to tell, and old wives to believe. He imagined the next would be, that the orators of Copenhagen

House had borrowed bob-wigs from the Duke of Norfolk, in order to make their appearances. All such idle tales, however, only proved the incessant calumnies to which the opposers of ministers were subject. A shocking instance of the malicious and wicked attempt which arose from the system that ministers patronized, happened during the state trials last year. At the very time when the bill was before the grand jury, in the case of those men whom a certain hon. gentleman chose to term "acquitted felons;" a story, which could not fail to impress instantly the public mind, of a terrible design to murder the king, by means of some new kind of instrument, was propagated. This was generally believed at the time, yet no such plot had been conceived, he believed, and this instrument no person had ever seen. Notwithstanding all this, prints, notoriously in ministerial pay, had said that the instrument was found, and the persons fully committed for trial. Thus, it was evident, how ministers would avail themselves of every incident which occurred, to render men suspicious whose influence and character might enable them to oppose their measures with success.

*Lord William Russell moved an adjournment, in order that an inquiry might take place into the facts which had been stated by Alderman Anderson as reasons for supporting the bill.*

*A division took place—ayes 32; noes 145. The bill was then read a first time.*

Mr. Sheridan observed, that he was happy to find that the hon. gentleman had abandoned part of his plan, since he had expunged that clause which related to private families. He was surprised, however, to find that meetings in fields, assembled without regard to the regulations in the bill, were to be held as disorderly houses.

*The house divided on the question, that the bill be read a second time—ayes 129; noes 22. A second division took place on the question, "That this bill be read a second time on Tuesday next—ayes 129; noes 23.*

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NOVEMBER 16.

TREASON AND SEDITION BILLS.

*A message was brought from the lords, that they had passed a bill for the better security of his Majesty's person, &c. Mr. Pitt moved, "That the bill be read a first time."*

MR. SHERIDAN said that it was not usual with him to argue a bill on the first reading of it, nor did he wish to enter upon



that discussion at present ; he would, therefore, only say, that he wished first of all to have the bill printed for the use of the members, and being determined to oppose it in every stage of its progress, he would take the sense of the house whether the bill should be read for the first time.

*A division took place—ayes 170 ; noes 26. Mr. Pitt then moved—" That the bill be read a second time on Tuesday next ?" The house divided—ayes 151 ; noes 25.*

Mr. Sheridan asked whether such a necessity did exist as justified the bill in question ? If this necessity did exist, then such a declaration went exactly to this point, that proof was attainable, and, therefore, that proof should be given. For his part, however, he had heard of no satisfactory proof for recurring to so violent a measure, nor had any satisfactory proof been yet adduced. Before the suspension of the habeas corpus act, ministers had condescended to act with some little decency and with some little deliberation, and had accordingly moved for the appointment of a committee of inquiry, upon the report of which committee they afterwards proceeded. If the report was necessary then, it was now more indispensable ; for, upon what possible principle could they call upon the members of that house to assent to the strong measures which were then offered them, unless they established an absolute necessity for such proceedings, and confirmed it by evidence ? He would not stoop to the proclamation as a proof, for he considered that proclamation as the declaration of the minister. What authority then was there for consenting to this bill ? The evidence in the house of lords, and the address of congratulation to his Majesty for his escape ? That was not sufficient ; for without examining a single witness, the house had been content to take the matter as it stood, and had joined in the address of the other house without any farther inquiry. To this he did not object, so far as it related to the address alone ; on the contrary, he very readily concurred in it ; but did any man think that that evidence, taken in the house of lords, so vague and contradictory as it was in every part of it, and that address which followed, were by any means sufficient to justify two bills like those which were in consequence produced ? When he considered this more deliberately, he was placed in a disagreeable dilemma ; for either he was obliged to imagine that a large body of men, capable of committing trea-

son and the most horrible outrages, was actually in motion, or else he must suppose that there were men capable of inventing and believing anything, who, for their own base purposes, or from the influence of the most deplorable credulity, cherished the idea of pretended sedition to accomplish their designs of destroying the liberties of their country. It was always more hard to believe the lesser evil, though in this precise instance he was compelled to do so. He was not only inclined to think, but confirmed in his opinion by subsequent events, that the present alarm had been created solely by ministers, for the accomplishment of their corrupt purposes of libelling the country. He again repeated that this opinion was not grounded upon any superficial view of the subject, but from the express experience of the conduct, temper, and loyalty of the people. He remarked, that in 1792, for similar purposes, similar reports of plots and conspiracies had been industriously circulated. They were asserted in parliament; they were pointed out in publications; and then, as now, they formed a part of the king's proclamation. It was then generally rumoured, and as generally believed, that a party was in readiness to seize the Tower and commence a revolution. Before any person took notice of this manœuvre too, the most extraordinary means were adopted and enforced to circulate the proclamation through every part of the kingdom with unexampled rapidity; troops were thrown into the Tower to defend it from attack, and all the government appeared in consternation and dismay. He remembered also, in the course of the trials which followed, that he had the most complete and distinct proof that the whole of these atrocious acts originated with the informers, reporters, and spies employed on that occasion. Objection might be made to his attendance on those trials; but as he had some cause to doubt the existence of conspiracies, he was resolved to see fair play, and he only discharged his duty as a member of parliament, and one of the guardians of the public welfare, in so doing. At those trials, he again repeated, that he found the whole idea of a revolution to be forged; that the informers, reporters, and spies, one and all, declared, that they had never suggested such danger was existing, and that the whole, upon the clearest and best connected evidence, was proved to be a fabrication. Now, this demonstrated how far the declarations of ministers were to be trusted. It was true that a com-



mittee had been appointed, and that from that committee they received accounts of an extensive treasonable plot. The existence of the plot, however, was brought from higher authority, and the trials were deferred till books could be prepared with suitable decorations, and the copperplates engraved with the representation of pikes, to alarm and irritate the public mind. Here he came again to the juries, who, in repeated cases, negatived the existence of any treason or conspiracy. At the same time, however, we received intelligence of a third plot, of which he had had occasion to speak before—a plot which was investigated by the magistrates of government, and in some degree confirmed by their proceedings—a plot which was published, with every dreadful particular and exaggerating comment in all the ministerial papers. This supposed plot, after all, was a contrivance for the assassination of his Majesty at one of the theatres, with a strange instrument which was never found, and by men who were afterwards released. It was discovered, or pretended to be discovered, which with ministers was nearly the same thing, at a very seasonable time, for it was while the bill was pending upon which the other persons, who were afterwards acquitted by the juries, were indicted. He knew not whether ministers had purposely contrived this plot to prejudice the minds of those juries; he hoped—he believed—they could not be so deliberately cruel. It was an action, however, which would always expose them to censure, and he knew not with what feeling they would consider it, when they recollected that men had been for a long time detained in prison, and afterwards discharged without any allegations, ruined in their fortunes—as some of them he heard had been—and undone in their reputations. It was certainly clear that the men who were apprehended upon this horrible scheme of assassination were not guilty of the crime laid to their charge, or they would not have been released in the manner they had been; and what redress could be given to them he was not able to tell, nor was it his business to inquire. This, however, was the third proof of forgery. He now came to the present times. Here he was obliged again to recur to his Majesty's speech upon the opening of parliament—that speech, which praises the loyal temper of the people, and recommends the spirit of order and submission to the laws which they had shown under a severe pressure, as an additional

incentive for parliament to apply with the utmost diligence to the consideration of such measures as may tend to alleviate their distresses. When this declaration was delivered, it was plain that ministers had no idea of the existing paucity. We then heard congratulations in that house upon the advantages derived from the war; one of which was, that it had not only destroyed all violent revolutionary principles in France, but that it had produced a similar effect upon men's minds in this country. Here Mr. Sheridan wished to know how they could possibly reconcile these declarations with those which they have since made. How could they presume, in consequence of one desperate outrage committed by some misguided individual, or, at the most, upon their own confession, by a few miscreants, to deprive so loyal, so patient, so submissive a people as they acknowledged the majority to be, of their dearest and most sacred rights? He recollected, indeed, what the right hon. gentleman had that day said with great warmth, when reminding him that he had forgotten the progressive irritation; "What," said he, "when meetings have multiplied and hand-bills are swarming everywhere, shall we assert there is no necessity for these restrictions?" But these meetings, then, must have multiplied since the meeting of parliament; these hand-bills must have swarmed since the meeting of parliament: because, if they were so notorious before, why did they put that declaration into his Majesty's mouth? or why did the right hon. gentleman himself assert that French principles were almost eradicated by the war? Upon these grounds, Mr. Sheridan insisted, that he still had reason to believe it a forged plot. If the right hon. gentleman would persevere in his declaration, that an increasing alarm and spirit of discontent prevailed throughout the country, let him prove it. He had moved a committee before, then why not now? He took measures then for the investigation of a plot, when the reasons were not one hundred thousandth part so strong. If he therefore now asserts that a treasonable plot is actually in existence, and flies from an investigation of it, is it not natural to conclude he cannot prove it? But he thinks all proof unnecessary, provided he can persuade the house to adopt his declaration. Yet surely when he spoke of the unanimous loyalty of an unanimous people, though he suddenly seemed apprehensive lest some danger should be taken of his words in that construction, by adding "with a small



exception;" yet surely I say, repeated Mr. Sheridan, when he spoke of such unanimous loyalty, he cannot persist; nor would any man say that, for the ungovernable licentiousness of the few excepted, all these obedient, virtuous, generous, and uncomplaining people should be deprived of their dearest liberties. No person, however hardened, could have the front to do it. But the right hon. gentleman always flies off to France for his examples. France is the war-horse he mounts upon these occasions, and it would be a happy thing for this country if he would mount that war-horse less often. In France he enumerates all the instances of treason, murder, and rebellion which arose from popular assemblies. In France he recapitulates the various atrocities of anarchy and bloodshed; the confusion and desolation which followed the commotions of the people; and then exclaims, if such and such causes produce such and such effects in France, would not similar causes produce similar effects in England? But is it not a libel on the English constitution; is it not a libel on the English people to draw such conclusions? There is no parity whatever; and he had always deprecated such a wretched, narrow, miserable mode of reasoning. The right hon. gentleman had surely forgotten that the enormities of the French people were occasioned by the despotism under which they had so long groaned; that their excesses, when free, were to be attributed to their former slavery; that they had been oppressed and ground down till they had lost the common feelings and the common character of humanity, and that they were provoked and instigated by the evils which surrounded them till they became enraged beyond all moderation. He therefore denied that similar enormities could ever happen in England, and condemned such an opinion as one of the most mischievous that ever entered the head of a statesman. To argue that the same principles would have the same influence over Englishmen as they have had over the deluded people of France, was to argue with a total ignorance of history, of general policy, and of human nature itself. It was impossible that anything could work so fatal an ascendancy, not even if the same men who brought about those evils in France were to be in possession of similar authority here. It was the despotic government that had degraded and debased the French beneath the dignity of men and drove them to extremes; but a people who have been used

to rational liberty and rational rights, who have not been ground down, nor made the slaves of a corrupt government, would never be guilty of such crimes. He pressed this the more, because it was the sole principle upon which the gentlemen of the opposite side rested; and unless it could be proved absolutely that the bill was intended for the protection of the monarch and the constitution, he was unwilling to surrender the rights and liberties of the subject on such slight grounds. To detect the fallacy and false principles of such reasoning in a parallel view, he might urge that it would equally apply to prove, in all cases, the barbarity and ill faith of monarchs; and that after expatiating on the cruel conduct of the Empress of Russia, and the bad faith of the King of Prussia, an enemy to limited monarchy would be entitled to draw a conclusion that all monarchs must be barbarous and faithless, and thence contend for curtailing the power of the present King of England. The parallels would run together, and it would be found very difficult to oppose the force of such reasoning. An hon. gentleman had said, the other night, that desperate evils must have desperate remedies. This he acknowledged; but then he insisted that the existence of the evils should be proved. The connection between the popular meetings and the outrage on his Majesty he denied; and thought at the late county meeting for Hertfordshire, an hon. gentleman (Mr. Baker) had acted with great impropriety in coupling the congratulation to his Majesty with a charge against the societies. He called it a charge so long as it was impossible to have investigation; but if it were possible to have investigation, and gentlemen should then fly from it, he should no longer call it a charge but a calumny. An hon. gentleman (Mr. Canning) had asserted also, that the doctrine of king-killing was preached at Copenhagen House. Now if such doctrines had been preached, prosecutions must have been commenced, or else there must have been great neglect in the magistrates and the executive government, and consequently he was authorised to disbelieve it. So far, however, from preaching such pernicious doctrines, it was generally known that they professed a spirit of loyalty to his Majesty, notwithstanding their declamations against his ministers, against the war, and in support of a parliamentary reform. Another right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had that evening said, that inflammatory handbills were swarming in every part of the metro-



polis. Why might not these handbills be written and published by some of the spies for their own profit and advantage? Had not the spies themselves confessed, in a court of justice, that to encourage and deceive others they were the loudest in a cry for a reform, and the most forward to use inflammatory language? Here again, then, he had no proof that those handbills were published or circulated by the societies, unless they would suffer him to know from whom those handbills came, and how they were obtained. If once a government encourages spies and informers, it becomes a part of their business to commit such forgeries and create such terror. The right hon. gentleman might contradict him by saying that the business of spies and informers is a respectable and necessary trade; but Mr. Sheridan maintained it would never be respected by mankind, and therefore, such odium and such suspicions must of course attach to it. Except in the solitary instance of Watts, however, he conceived it expedient that ministers should support their spies with whom they acted, as the men formerly did who brought up thieves, and instructed them, while young in stealing, to share their profits. He had himself heard a person declare that, in the heat of his zeal and loyalty, he appointed a person to watch those whom he suspected, for which he gave him a guinea per week, but that at the last he brought such alarming accounts, that he gave him two guineas per week. Such, he said, would be the case, and we should go on from bad to worse, and he would not fear to attribute it to these very measures. He then took notice of the immense meeting which had that day been assembled in Westminster, and the order and decorum exhibited on that occasion; yet, if this meeting had been held before the meeting of parliament, he should not have been surprised if it had been used as an argument for the necessity of this bill. He wished an hon. gentleman (Mr. Canning) would come into this committee and prove that the societies did preach the doctrine of king-killing; and concluded by moving, "That a committee be appointed, to inquire into the existence and extent of the danger of seditious meetings, as referred to in his Majesty's proclamation, and laid before the house by his Majesty's minister on the fourth of November."

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NOVEMBER 17.

## TREASON AND SEDITION BILLS.

*On the question of the second reading of this bill,*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that he thought it most unlikely that he should have been called upon to trouble the house. It was his intention to have left the discussion to other gentlemen, who had taken a less active share in the former stages of the debate, and who had more ability to command the attention of the house. He did not know whether he should be able to answer the speech of the noble lord (Mornington), which was marked, at least, with some degree of labour and preparation. But he might now take to himself the credit of having predicted what would be the case when the house had refused his motion of inquiry. He had then said that, though they declined inquiry, they would take other means of bringing forward information of a nature calculated to aid the impression which they meant to convey to the house. That the learned gentleman would begin skirmishing with his extracts and paragraphs; that the noble lord would come forward with his heavy artillery of speeches and pamphlets; and, perhaps, that some other hon. gentleman might be ready to produce cuts and prints, in order to confirm the statements of the others. All this he had expected, nor had he been greatly disappointed in the event. But he had declared, on a former occasion, that he gave no credit to the assertions of the hon. gentlemen on that side of the question. He spoke not from any motive of personal disrespect, but from the repeated experience of what had been the system of their policy; but if he gave no credit in general to the assertions of that party, much less was he disposed to give credit to the assertions of the noble lord. He recollected that he had two years since come forward, in the same sonorous tone, and with the same pompous manner, with the same assumed air of importance, leaning upon the table, bringing forward scrap after scrap, and quoting passage after passage, in order to prove that France would only be able to carry on the war for a few months longer. In the event, however, the noble lord had been most completely mistaken; France had found means to carry on the war long beyond the period which the noble lord had fixed for the termination of her resources, and was now even more formidable to her enemies than at the period when the noble lord had so confidently predicted her destruction. Yet, undiscouraged



by this failure of his predictions, he now came forward with the same tone, and in the same attitude, to announce, that a revolution was now pending in England. Events had completely falsified all his former assertions ; the disappointment, however, had not prevented a repetition of the same presumptuous airs, and the same dogmatical propositions on the present occasion. The noble lord asserted, that he had made out a connection between the outrage against his Majesty and the proceedings of the meeting at Copenhagen House—a connection, however, which, Mr. Sheridan said, he would contend to be as remote, as was that of the speech of the noble lord with the question before the house. The noble lord had stated that there must be something extraordinary in the outrage against his Majesty, from the general character of loyalty which had been maintained by the people of this country, and had intimated that this outrage must be ascribed to motives very different from those which had existed at former times. There were, however, other times, and those too not very remote, when a few desperate persons had been guilty of nearly similar acts of outrage against his Majesty. He alluded to what had taken place at the period of the Middlesex election. He asked the noble lord whether a similar spirit of outrage had not manifested itself in other parts of the country—whether tumults and riots had not taken place of so serious a nature that the aid of the military had been called in, and the troops of his Majesty (what must always be sincerely deplored) had shed the blood of his subjects? To what, said Mr. Sheridan, was this temper of irritation and tumult in so many parts of the country to be ascribed? Not, he was convinced, to any exertions of the Corresponding Society ; for these symptoms had appeared in quarters where they could not have been supposed to have had any influence ; they were to be ascribed to the general state of pressure arising from the war, to the apprehensions of approaching scarcity, and in some instances to the actual ravages of famine. He respected the person of the sovereign, but he still more respected the law, which was above even the sovereign. And if he saw men rash, irritated, driven to extremity from the grinding and biting influence of poverty, while repairing home to their starving families, excited to a violation of the law, might he not believe that the same persons would, under the same circumstances, be provoked to outrage against the sovereign? If he saw

the one, had he not a right to infer the other, without having recourse to any intermediate cause? The noble lord was particularly indignant at theoretical lectures on government. The speech of the noble lord was, however, nothing else than a theoretical lecture on government, bating the few extracts which he had contrived to introduce, and a lecture for which, Mr. Sheridan said, he would not give sixpence. He then adverted to the maxim brought forward by his Majesty's ministers, that the same doctrine would produce the same effects upon the minds of the vulgar in all countries; the narrowest maxim that ever entered into the mind of a statesman. With respect to Geneva, which the noble lord had referred to as displaying the effects resulting from the introduction of French principles, would the noble lord contend that Geneva had ever enjoyed the same constitution as Great Britain? His lordship had, on this occasion, quoted the authority of D'Ivernois, whose opinion might be suspected to be somewhat biassed, as he was a pensioner of ministers. Geneva had been alternately subject to France and Savoy, and had been continually torn asunder by contending factions. The noble lord had alluded to America, as displaying the effect of republican principles; in this part of the allusion, however, he could not follow his lordship; America was at peace with this country, and in a state of the highest prosperity. The reasoning that might be found to hold with respect to persons under a different government, would not apply to subjects of the British constitution. Men bred under a constitution like this, were accustomed to the enjoyment of their rights; they were in the habit of discussing the measures of rational freedom, and fully knew how to prize its blessings. It was not probable that such men should all at once be brought to relish a state of anarchy. Of what stuff did ministers think that the hearts of Englishmen were made? He remarked that the true character of Englishmen could be but little known to ministers who had, from motives of pride, declined to mix in popular assemblies; and who afterwards, from their political practices, might think it not very safe to meet any numerous assemblage of their countrymen. It is not to be wondered at that such ministers should say, that the hearts of Englishmen are the same as those of Frenchmen, and that the propagation of the same doctrines would produce the same effects upon their conduct. He remarked that when the noble lord had talked of the positive



and foul treason which had issued from the shop of Citizen Lee, it might very naturally have been asked, why the attorney-general had not prosecuted Citizen Lee? The noble lord regretted the repeal of the suspension of the habeas corpus, and had stated that, ever since that period, things had been going on in a state progressively worse. The noble lord had expressed great indignation at the attempt to divide the higher from the inferior classes. Upon this he must remark, that those who held out the poor as the objects of apprehension, showed, at the same time, that they felt the necessity of additional securities to their own property. Hence was afforded a pretext for the multiplication of the penal laws. He had confidence in the hearts of the poor of this country, and from that circumstance he was enabled to treat with contempt the idea of the existence of those false plots. He remarked, that there were but few who were disposed to treat the idea of those plots with any degree of seriousness. It was therefore the more abominable that they should be made the pretext of depriving the people of this country of the most valuable part of their freedom. Mr. Sheridan remarked that the scraps and extracts which had been read to them were not evidence. Such was his bad opinion of ministers, that he even believed that their own agents might be the fabricators of the papers charged upon the Corresponding Society. As to the handbill entitled "King-killing," he himself should treat it with the most perfect disregard, for he was assured it could excite but one sentiment in the people of this country—universal abhorrence and contempt. Mr. Sheridan here adverted to a circumstance which he had mentioned before, the treatment of those concerned in the poisoned arrow, or pop-gun plot. What a handle had ministers made of this report, even though they must, from the first moment, have been sensible of its futility. What an impression had they not, by that means, endeavoured to circulate through the country. But what had been the treatment of the unfortunate men against whom the charge was brought? They had been confined in prison for a number of months, and were at last dismissed upon bail, without being brought to trial, blasted in their characters, and bankrupt in their fortunes. Such a mode of procedure argued a total want of feeling and of principle in those who could sanction it by their authority. Mr. Sheridan appealed to members whether they had that satisfactory and conscientious evidence of the grounds

upon which ministers had brought forward their measures, which could justify them in dispensing with an inquiry, and enable them to say that they had fully done their duty to their constituents. Was it possible that the house could be satisfied with the miserable proofs adduced by the noble lord? With the utmost diligence and industry had the noble lord been looking for plots, but he could find none. Would the house decide on the most important subject ever offered to their consideration, upon vile scraps, collected by rummaging every old book-shop, and turning up the dirt of every filthy stall in London? Good God Almighty! in what place was it that he spoke? To whom did he address himself? How would the members of that house face their constituents, after sacrificing everything held valuable by their ancestors, if they should agree to make that sacrifice without all the information and all the proofs which the nature of the case would admit? What might convince them might not have the same effect upon others. They should consider that they were all of them the servants of the people of England. They voted and acted in that house, not in their individual capacity, but as agents and attorneys for others, and they would not perform their duty, if they could not satisfy the reasonable inquiries of their constituents. He was of opinion that this measure would create that disaffection and those plots, the supposed existence of which was made the pretext for its adoption. There was nothing which he deprecated more than a revolution; but he believed it was not impossible that the people might be driven to some violent remedy, rendered, by circumstances, plausible if not necessary. With regard to the London Corresponding Society, he could not join in the clamour that had been raised against it. He did not doubt but it might contain persons who had nothing in view but their own interest, while they appeared to be actuated only by motives of patriotism. For in what society (that alone excepted in which he had now the honour to speak) were there not such interested and unworthy persons to be found? He denied that the people of England were a disloyal or an ungrateful race. Mr. Attorney-General need not (in the debate of last night) have lamented so pathetically the danger of his son not attaining to the honour and emoluments which he so deservedly enjoyed—honours and emoluments for which he was indebted not only to industry, but to great talents and an unblemished character. There did



not appear any danger that the emoluments of office or of professions would decrease. It was much more probable that the condition of the poor would become worse. He would ask any gentleman of estate, any merchant, or man of property, who had performed acts of generosity to the people, whether they had ever found them unthankful. The house should now look and see whether they were not going to give the people cause to be unthankful and discontented. The minister, who was now raising guards and securities for himself, reckoned, perhaps, too much on the patience of the people; the house should be cautious of irritating them.

*Sir John Rous said, he had been absent from the house a short time owing to indisposition, but he understood it had been stated by a gentleman on the other side of the house, that if members gave their assent to the present bill they could never dare to face their constituents. He wholly denied any such assertion; and to prove what were the sentiments of his constituents, a meeting had been held the preceding day in Suffolk, at which it was ungnimously resolved to instruct their members to support any measure which might be brought forward to secure his Majesty's government, and check those seditious assemblies which had so justly alarmed the nation.*

Mr. Sheridan, in reply to what had dropped from Sir John Rous, said, that the hon. baronet had been egregiously misinformed as to the purport of the expression which he had employed. What he said was, that if the committee which he required for the purpose of ascertaining certain facts, was not granted by the members of that house, when they next met their constituents, they must inform them that they had given their support to the bill before the house, without having taken the means of informing themselves of the grounds on which so extraordinary a measure was founded.

*The house divided—for the second reading 213; against it 43.*

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NOVEMBER 23.

TREASON AND SEDITION.

*Lord Sheffield presented a petition from the inhabitants of Bristol, praying that the aforesaid bills might not pass into a law.*

MR. SHERIDAN remarked, that the petition seemed to have fallen into improper hands, for the noble lord had not made any observations upon it, nor had he mentioned by how many persons it was signed, though Mr. Sheridan understood it was signed by no less than four thousand.

*Lord Sheffield having said a few words in reply—*

Mr. Sheridan repeated what he had before suspected, that the petition had fallen into improper hands; nor was he the only person who suspected this, for he had received a letter from a gentleman at Bristol, who was apprehensive that the noble lord would not make it known to be the general sense of the inhabitants of Bristol, and did therefore wish that it should be stated to the house. The petition was drawn up and signed in due form, and the signatures were those of the most respectable persons in that city.

*The petition was ordered to lie on the table.*

Mr. Sheridan presented a petition from the inhabitants of Chester against the bills. He said, that in this city, as well as in various parts of the country, counter petitions were attempted to be procured, a principle to which government had long been attentive. The late outrage on his Majesty's person, which no man execrated more than he did, had been taken advantage of by them, to extort from the people a sanction of the present measures, for which purpose they had used all their influence. But he would, notwithstanding, venture to assert that none of the few petitions which called for the suppression of seditious meetings were meant to convey any acquiescence in the measures which ministers were determined to adopt under that pretence; and even a right hon. gentleman opposite him (Mr. Dundas) had allowed that laws so serious should not take place, unless agreed to by a majority of the people. Where then were the grounds for pressing the bills, when it could not be proved that in one single instance their contents had been explained, or properly understood by the persons who might be supposed to favour them? He read a letter which accompanied the petition, addressed to himself, explaining the conduct of those who were endeavouring to procure signatures to a counter petition in the city of Chester, where schoolboys, and all manner of persons, had been called upon to sign a paper of that nature; and so hasty were they to accomplish their object that time was not allowed to the subscribers to read the petition.

*Lord Belgrave assured the house, that he had received a letter from Chester, informing him that an address to the king from the respectable inhabitants, praying for those strong measures against the seditious societies, was in a state of much forwardness. As the hon. gentleman (Mr. Sheridan) had stated, that the persons whose names were signed to the petition then before them, were of such considerable respectability, he should beg leave to read the description which*



*he had received of them :—it described them as jacobins who had undertaken a job, for which they wanted many hands ; and expressed a probability that they might, in a great measure, be successful, as several schoolboys and dissenters had been induced to sign the article, as had also some well-disposed persons, whom they had prevailed upon by asking them whether they had any objection to a good peace ? His lordship judged it necessary to communicate so much to the house, for the purpose of showing that they were not the most respectable part of the citizens, but the lower class of the people of Chester who had signed the petition in question.*

Mr. Sheridan observed, that it was by no means improbable that many of the lower classes of the people had signed the petition, and for this cogent reason, that they wished for an alleviation of their distresses by the return of peace. With respect to calling schoolboys away from their lessons on this occasion, he believed that applied better to the other side of the question, and he certainly thought it highly improper to take them away from learning their Greek. The meeting had been regularly and duly convened by public advertisement, and the unanimity which prevailed on the occasion was almost universal. If it was true that the present petition was signed only by the lower orders, it was highly favourable to their understanding, and proved that they were far better judges of the constitution of England than the higher class, who were about to adopt a different line of conduct ; for they had communicated their sentiments to the proper branch of the legislature, while their superiors had resolved to petition the king, who had nothing to do with the formation of laws, to take strong measures for suppressing seditious meetings. What could betray more ignorance than this ? or what could be a greater insult offered to the constitution than a recommendation to his Majesty to enact laws, and thereby to exercise a power which belongs only to the legislature ? He could not forbear remarking, that the noble lord seemed attached to that system which drew a line between the higher and lower ranks of life.

*Lord Belgrave said, that the success imputed to the petition was apprehended from the private and insidious means made use of ; whereas the address was openly voted at a public meeting called by the mayor. No one knew of the meeting for the petition, it being only advertised in one inflammatory newspaper.*

Mr. Sheridan conceived that, after the bill was passed, according to this argument, there never could be a public meeting, for all opposition papers would be esteemed inflammatory and seditious.

*The petition was then read by the clerk, and ordered to lie on the table.*

Mr. Sheridan then presented a petition from Sheffield against the bills, signed by near eight thousand persons, many of whom were of the first consequence and respectability. This he thought it necessary to mention, lest the name of Sheffield should frighten any gentleman in that house, who might bear in his remembrance the indignant treatment which a former petition from that town had experienced.

*Ordered to lie on the table.*

Mr. Sturt presented a petition from the London Corresponding Society, signed by 12,113 persons against the bills. He warmly exculpated that society from the imputations of treason or sedition. In order to show, at the same time, the malevolent intentions of ministry and its partizans, he produced a performance, attributed to Mr. Reeves (the framer and president of the associations against republicans and levellers), wherein it was unequivocally maintained, "that the government of England was a monarchy; but the monarch was the ancient stock, from which have sprung those goodly branches of the legislature, the lords and commons; that these, however, were still only branches, and that they might be lopped off, and the tree be a tree still—shorn, indeed, of its honours, but not, like them, cast into the fire." So flagrant a violation of the principles of English constitution, excited the indignation, not only of the opposition, but of many of the members friendly to ministers. The public loudly proclaimed it a stab aimed at the vitals of the constitution, and loaded the author with the most opprobrious epithets. So universal was the detestation of the principles contained in this performance, that it was judged requisite, in order to appease the public, formally to vote it a libel on the constitution, and to direct the attorney-general to prosecute the author.

Mr. Sheridan asserted, that if the house entertained a wish not to calumniate the societies, they would immediately accede to the hearing of evidence. Hitherto the proceedings had been founded upon false facts. It had fallen in his way to know that the noble lord (Mornington) had been egregiously deceived, and that charges and assertions had been made which could not be proved. He had reason to know that Citizen Lee was not printer or publisher to the society, and that no handbills, containing the doctrine of king-killing, had been circulated by their order. Another society, called the Friends of Freedom, had branched from the London Corresponding Society. A member of that society was suspected of being a spy. At one of the meetings he said he had something to propose—the lights were extinguished, and several of these handbills were thrown about the room. As soon as they were discovered, the meeting took



measures to discover the person who had scattered them; and they did not separate until they had come to a strong resolution against the hand-bills. Was it then fit that the house should, on mere unsupported assertions, proceed to strike so deadly a blow at the most valuable liberties of the people? Gentlemen would do well to pause, and to consider the strong facts urged by Mr. Sturt in his speech—a speech which, though not couched in so measured a strain of eloquence as he had heard, still contained excellent sense. In that speech a charge had been brought forward, surely of no light kind. Was it a light thing that a man in the pay of government should publish so atrocious a libel upon the house of commons?—Was such a libel only to be laughed at?—And this was the calamitous state of affairs, that there was the most marked partiality shown by government to their own adherents. When it suited their purposes to encourage massacre and bloodshed, they did encourage it. He alluded to the transactions of 1791. He complained of the total want of activity against the church and king mobs—he complained of the libels circulated against the dissenters of that time—where had been the activity of government then? For his own part he was not in the habit of advising prosecutions for libels, but there was the pamphlet alluded to, and a work of Mr. Arthur Young's, which contained more atrocious libels than any of which government complained.

*Mr. Pitt said, he did not mean to argue upon any of the sentiments contained in the pamphlet; the leading consideration was, whether it was a breach of privilege or not? and, if it was, he thought, instead of recommending the attorney-general to prosecute, the house should vindicate its privileges by acts of its own. However, he was at present for passing to the order of the day. He afterwards said that no complaint of breach of privilege had been made. There could be no doubt of the order which the rules of the house authorised where such a complaint was formally stated; but, as the customary mode of introducing the subject had been neglected, it ought not to be taken up in preference to the order of the day.*

Mr. Sheridan said, it was easy to get rid of the dilemma which the right hon. gentleman had made out. In order, therefore, to remove the punctilio devised by the political special pleader, he would now comply with the forms of the house, and move that the particular passage be taken down; which being done, he urged the propriety of an immediate discussion. He quoted another sentence or two from the pamphlet, and said that he

would not advert to the outrage which the passage also reflected against the lords, but leave them to assert their own dignity; nor would he insult the feelings or the understanding of the house, by enlarging upon the atrocity of the outrage, as if anything were necessary to convey to their minds a proper sense of its magnitude.

*The question for the reading of the pamphlet was put, and agreed to without a division.*

Mr. Sheridan said, the house had now heard the whole of a pamphlet, which he had originally, from the extract quoted by his hon. friend, condemned in its principle and tendency—it was now to be admitted upon full proof to be the falsest, foulest, dullest, and most malicious pamphlet that had ever issued from a prostituted press. He trusted that it would be a future lesson to gentlemen, on the other side of the house, how they rashly vindicated, explained, or adopted the principles of a man who circulated such libels against the constitution of the country. But it was with peculiar concern he saw the adoption of those principles by the right hon. gentleman, who had formerly, with his great eloquence and various acquirements, adorned that side of the house, because the public, from the recollection of the sentiments of liberty he had then uttered, and with so great effect maintained, could not fail, in his present apostacy, to infer that his former life had been governed by the impulse of interested hypocrisy. He said, gentlemen required time to deliberate; that he would not press any motion upon them. Doubts indeed had been started, whether this man were of importance enough to attract and call for the weighty and immediate notice of that house; but they should consider, that this person was the main agent and propagator, the instigator and abettor of all those unconstitutional assemblies which, upon French principles, had invaded the country. He considered him, however, as too despicable for that species of trial which Sacheverel, whose works contained no principles more detestable, had suffered. He would not insult their understandings by a detail of the book, every page of which betrayed the true sentiments of the author, and added to the original atrocity of the libel. He concluded with moving “That the said pamphlet is a malicious, scandalous, and seditious libel, containing matter tending to create jealousies and divisions among his Majesty’s subjects, to alienate their af-



fections from our present form of government as established in king, lords, and commons, and to subvert the true principles of our free constitution; and that the said pamphlet is a high breach of the privileges of this house.

*The attorney general could not, he said, solemnly deliver his opinion now whether the pamphlet was or was not a libel, but he would make himself master of the subject, and thought there could be no difficulty in preparing gentlemen to decide as it became legislators on Thursday.*

Mr. Sheridan said, he was ready to decline pressing for hasty decision, and even to give time for the longest delay. When the hon. and learned gentleman professed so much anxiety to set at rest the public mind, by a speedy discussion of the bills, it was not from any fair and honest motive to allay any agitation which might arise in the country from a difference of sentiment, but in order to prevent the manifestation of the public mind with respect to those bills.

*The question for adjourning the consideration of the pamphlet till Thursday, passed without a division. Mr. Pitt then moved, "that the committee on the bills should be postponed till Wednesday." Mr. Fox moved an amendment, postponing it till this day se'nnight.*

*Mr. Alderman Newnham said, that gentlemen seemed to take it for granted that, at the public meetings, there had been nothing but cool deliberate discussion. With respect to the common hall, the crowd was so great, and the clamour so incessant, that it was impossible to decide what were the sentiments of the majority. Many had assented to the proceedings without ever knowing what were the resolutions for which they voted. Guildhall, it was well known, was a long building: his voice could not reach above half its extent, and when he attempted to speak they would not hear him; nay, even his own constituents would not hear Mr. Lushington, who is so able a speaker. The same riotous conduct had taken place at the Middlesex meeting, where Mr. Mainwaring had to complain of a similar want of attention.*

Mr. Sheridan replied, that in each of these cases the opinion of the people had been fully manifested. The decision of the Westminster meeting had been confirmed by the parochial meetings which had since been held; and he was confident that the decision of the common hall would be equally established by the opinion of the several wards. With respect to what he had stated, that certain gentlemen had not been heard, he might refer the worthy alderman for an answer to the right hon. gentleman, who, in 1784, had stated to his right hon. friend (Mr. Fox) what must be his situation of degradation with regard to his constituents, when they refused to listen to his sentiments,

He remarked that the right hon. secretary at war (Mr. Wyndham) had that day distinguished himself in a manner which would not soon be forgotten, and he trusted would not easily be forgiven. He had said that his right hon. friend had not, by his explanation, retracted his original declaration. Did he expect him to quibble, prevaricate, and shuffle, like some other right hon. gentlemen? He ought to have known him better. He might have expected, from the candour and manliness of his nature, that he would repeat, without shrinking, his original declaration. The right hon. secretary at war called for a rigour beyond the law. When such language was adopted in that house, it might be a question how long the freedom of discussion might be suffered to remain. His apprehension of such a catastrophe was increased, when he understood that the right hon. gentleman had converted the metropolis into a garrison; that the soldiers were ordered to sleep all night at the feet of their horses, with one foot in the stirrup, ready to be called at a moment's warning. The secretary at war, said Mr. Sheridan, arraigns my right hon. friend, when he talks of resistance. But if he does not regard us as hypocrites, what other language should we use? We tell the country that, if these bills pass, the constitution is lost! Here Mr. Sheridan repeated what Mr. Fox had stated, with respect to resistance. If a degraded and oppressed majority of the people applied to him, he would advise them to acquiesce in those bills, only as long as resistance was imprudent. They had affirmed that these bills went directly to overturn the constitution; if they were sincere in that language, what other answer could they give to the people than that which they now avowed? What contemptible wretches must they be, if—while under the shelter of their privilege they professed the measures to be calculated to overturn the constitution, and infringe the Bill of Rights—they shrunk back on such an occasion, from stating that which they conceived to be the undoubted right of the subject, to resist oppression, when all legal means of redress were refused. Good God! what a situation were they reduced to. A corrupt majority was to pass these bills, which were a part of all revolutionary government—a system of terror was begun, and they were to be trampled under the feet of a British Robespierre—(a cry of “hear him! hear him!” from the ministerial side of the house) yes, said Mr. Sheridan, the resem-



blance is too striking to be overlooked. Robespierre, to maintain his authority, kept the people in incessant alarm about plots and conspiracies, which were necessary to him to bind the nation in stronger shackles—Robespierre could not visit the Mayor of Paris without his body-guard, and Robespierre put the whole country under military execution, under the pretext of security to the constitution. The tyrant, however, could not long practise these arts with impunity. A whole people could not long endure a slavery so detestable from a hand so worthless. To the declaration of Mr. Fox he implicitly subscribed. It must be the feeling of every true Englishman, or every man who acknowledged the principles which seated the illustrious family of Brunswick on the throne. His right hon. friend had said, that if the people of England were so dead to all their former feelings that they wished for these bills, then he was no longer a fit servant for such a people, and he had no occasion to have made that declaration; they did, and must, know the frame and texture of his soul could never suffer him to be the servants of slaves, as they must be if these bills passed into laws. Mr. Sheridan concluded, “I still hope, that the principles of the constitution are too deeply graven on the hearts of Englishmen to be erased by any seducement, and still less by any system of intimidation. The times are critical, no doubt, but there is, I trust, in the country, a sense and spirit in the people which will rise and prove equal to the occasion.”

*Mr. Fox's amendment was negatived without a division.*

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NOVEMBER 24.

TREASON AND SEDITION BILLS.

MR. SHERIDAN took notice of the charge which had been made of misrepresentation on the part of those who opposed the bills now before the house. He observed, that the minister complained of the speeches which had been made upon them. He had complained, that gentlemen who opposed him stated, that these bills did not leave to the people the right of petitioning; that they said that all meetings for that purpose had been done away. They had never said so; they had only said that the effect wished from meetings on political subjects would be done away; for if any meeting took place, it was in the power of two

magistrates to dissolve these meetings at their discretion. Any meetings on the questions of war or peace; on the conduct of the minister; on the miscarriages of his plans; on the nature of his projects, and on all points for which the opinion of the public could be useful in being made known to that house, would be done away by these bills. For, on all these points, one of the bills gave to the magistrates the power, not indeed of preventing meetings, but of dissolving them at pleasure, under a pretence that the proceedings of the meetings, in the judgment of such magistrate, tended to sedition. But it was said, that this bill allowed the people to assemble without any restraint, to discuss the merits of any depending law. This did not appear to him to be any very valuable exception, for, after the passing of the bill, it would be of very little consequence what law was afterwards proposed; indeed, the minister need not propose any other, for the moment this was passed, he would have established a complete despotism. It would be impossible for the people to utter a single word, on points the most essential to their rights, that were not agreeable to the justices who were to attend these meetings. This might, and most probably would be done, if any number of persons met for the purpose of obtaining a parliamentary reform, in the manner recommended some years ago by the minister himself. But as the minister had complained of the effect of misrepresentation on the subject of these bills, he would ask, whether he might not retort upon that charge? Here Mr. Sheridan alluded to the conduct of the minister and his friends, against the bill relative to the affairs of India, brought in by Mr. Fox. He wished to remind the house how the author of that bill had been misrepresented upon that occasion, by those who supported the present minister at that time; complaints of misrepresentation came not with the best grace from that quarter. Having made many observations on this point, he proceeded to observe on the effect which opposition to these bills had produced on the mind of the minister. It had already made him determine to lower his views, and this was evident from his having, to-night, elevated his voice, for that was a pretty general indication on which the house might rely. Strangers who heard the right hon. gentleman to-night, might think from his tone that he was more than ever determined to pursue his plan with vigour, but those who had heard him often, and who knew him better, drew from



that circumstance a contrary conclusion. They knew that in proportion as he was lofty in his manner, he was sinking in his intention, and therefore he, for one, should not now object to attending the discussion of the provisions of this bill in a committee—if to a committee it was to go—in order to see what sort of a thing the bill was intended to be at last. He should not object, he said, to attending to this, unless the minister should be unwilling that any of his opponents should be witnesses of his degradation. Mr. Sheridan proceeded to take notice of an argument that had been often used with regard to the degree of weight and credit that was due to petitions from the people, and what was or was not to be considered as the voice of the people. He was sorry that a right hon. gentleman (Mr. Dundas) was not now in that house; he heard that minister say, that this bill ought not to pass, unless the sense of the people was clearly in its favour; he only wanted this declaration to be adhered to—and if it was, he was confident this bill would never pass into a law. Upon this part of the subject he alluded to the many petitions which already had been brought in, and argued, that time ought to be given, in order that the house might see how many would be brought on both sides of the question; and he was confident, in that case, the real sense of the people would soon put an end to these measures. He should himself present a petition from the ward of Farringdon-without, signed by 1700 persons, who, as he understood, made up one-sixth of the whole city of London, and many other members had petitions from numerous bodies of men from different parts of the kingdom. He said this, because he had heard from some worthy magistrates, that a great number of petitions would come from the most respectable housekeepers in the kingdom, in favour of the said bills; and there he could not help observing on what had fallen from a worthy magistrate of the city of London (Sir B. Hammett), who had said, “as well might these bills be said to be an infringement on the right of petition, as that hanging a man for forgery was an infringement on writing.” Had that worthy magistrate talked of the abuse of franking, he might have been listened to with more attention, for it was a subject on which he had some experience. Mr. Sheridan then took notice of what had been said by a worthy alderman (Lushington) who had introduced a topic which he thought ought to be deprecated in that house, because it might lead to

bad consequences;—he meant that of making a distinction between petitioners on account of the weight which was due to property; and it was property, and not numbers, which gave weight to petitions. This was a bad principle to be dwelt upon in the discussion of petitions in that house, nor was it universally followed by those who were the most ready to introduce it. He should be glad to know from the hon. gentleman (Mr. Mainwaring) who had complained of the treatment he met with at the meeting of the county of Middlesex, whether, if the case had been reversed there—that he had been joined by the company at large, and the noblemen who attended, had been against him and the company in their sentiments—he would then have said anything on the subject of property? In short, these distinctions between wealth and indigence, in considering the merits of petitions, were bad. To cry up the consequence of property against numbers, or to make a distinction between the owner of land, and the industry and labour of those who render it fertile, was a bad policy in that house, when any appeal was made to its justice in the form of petition.

*Mr. Ryder brought in a bill for preventing the obstruction to a free passage of grain throughout the kingdom, under the penalty of being kept to hard labour for a time to be agreed on in the committee. The bill was read a first time, and on the motion for the second reading—*

Mr. Sheridan said this bill might be a proper measure, but he did not like the increase of new penalties, as the existing laws appeared to him sufficient. He therefore moved that the bill be printed, in order to give the members opportunity to deliberate upon it

*Mr. Ryder was not surprised at the jealousy of the hon. gentleman upon any measure which tended to prevent tumultuous assemblies, but begged leave to inform him, that the existing laws were deemed inadequate, because it was uncertain whether they could apply precisely to the prevention of the obstruction to a free passage of grain within the kingdom, being enacted against obstructions to the exportation of it.*

Mr. Sheridan asserted that, notwithstanding the sarcasm of the right hon. gentleman, he had a right to be jealous of every measure which tended to increase the penalties of the statutes, and that this right is constitutional. He again repeated that he believed the laws sufficient to prevent any man, or body of men, from obstructing the passage of grain, especially if they proceeded to break open the sacks and steal the flour from them.



*The bill was ordered to be printed, and read a second time on Monday.*

Mr. Sheridan presented a petition against the convention bills from a numerous body of associated artizans, consisting of hatters, weavers, cordwainers, bookbinders, printers, carpenters, joiners, smiths, &c. &c. &c. to the number of 15,000. He next presented a petition of a similar nature from the Friendly Society of Working Bakers, to the number of 1000. The right hon. gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had asserted that the friendly societies would not be affected by these bills if they passed into a law; but Mr. Sheridan suspected when that part of the bill had been discussed, the right hon. gentleman would be convinced that he had been mistaken.

Mr. Sheridan then presented a petition against the bills from 4000 of the inhabitants of Birmingham. Had not the petitioners been pressed for time, it would have had an astonishing number more signatures. Such, too, was the situation of the people who signed this petition, that, in consequence of some ministerial manœuvre, they were denied a public meeting, for no newspaper would publish an advertisement to call a public meeting; nor was a single handbill suffered to be circulated for that purpose; yet, notwithstanding these discouragements, 4000 signatures had been subscribed in a day or two.

*Sir Edward Knatchbull did not rise to oppose the motion for the petition to lie upon the table, but to caution the house how it accepted that petition as the sense of the inhabitants of Birmingham. He was induced to this caution by a petition which lay upon the table of the house, and was presented in his absence by his hon. colleague (Mr. Honeywood), which was stated to be the petition of the mayor, recorder, freemen, and inhabitants of the city of Rochester. It was signed by 1500 persons, among whose names there were not more than 150 names of freemen, though Rochester contains 700 freemen, and between thirty and forty thousand inhabitants. He did not mean to cast any reflection on the persons who signed the petition, but he knew there were numbers who did not know what they signed. At the same time he had to observe, that the conduct of the chief magistrate of that city was reprehensible in suffering a procession which was a disgrace to the city, wherein the effigy of a reverend and respectable bishop was carried about the town and afterwards burnt.*

Mr. Sheridan reminded the house that he had stated the petition to be signed by 4000 inhabitants of Birmingham, and consequently no man who knew the immense population of that town, could imagine it was signed by the majority. If he had brought the letter which he received from a respectable gentleman of that town with the petition, he could have mentioned more precisely

the reason why a greater number of signatures were not obtained. One cause was, the rapidity with which the bills were pressed; another was, that an attempt had been made by the opposite party to promote violence if the meeting was called; and a third, and a very obvious reason, was that which he stated, that no advertisement had been published, and no hand-bills permitted to be circulated about the town. Thus the people were deprived of the means of a public meeting. And now he would say a word or two upon the Rochester tale, which, if the case had permitted, would have come with a better grace, so far as merely related to the name, from the neighbouring city of Canterbury, as it was of that species which is commonly called a Canterbury tale. He must remark, that it did not at all apply to the petition which he had just before presented from Birmingham; and, as he was about to present a petition from Warwick, he thought it had better be repeated, or some such ridiculous story substituted, since it would apply equally as well to Warwick as to Birmingham. He conceived the story was not at all entitled to credit, so far as it involved the persons who subscribed to the petition. He deprecated the circumstance, so far as it related to a reverend prelate, but suspected it had arisen from a statement in the public papers, which he hoped was a misrepresentation, as he could not for a moment imagine any learned and dignified person could be so indiscreet, and so ignorant of the principles of our constitution, as to say, "The mass of the people had nothing to do with the laws but to obey them!"

*Sir Edward Knatchbull explained again that he did not mean to throw any reflection on the persons who signed the petition, but he thought the mayor reprehensible in suffering the procession.*

Mr. Sheridan observed, this was an extraordinary explanation; for all he could understand by it was, that the hon. baronet thought it was no harm to burn a bishop, and therefore did not mean to reflect on the persons who permitted it; or else there was harm, and those persons who permitted the act were implicated in it.

Mr. Sheridan presented two petitions from Warwick against the bills. As much stress had been laid by some gentleman upon the respectability of the persons who signed the petition, he would state the first person who had signed these petitions was Lord Dormer; the third name was the name of a man who, though



no bishop, was, by his unrivalled learning, entitled to the respect and esteem of every person—he meant Dr. Samuel Parr.

Mr. Sheridan next presented a petition against the bills from the inhabitants of Kilmarnock. Notwithstanding the people of Scotland were restrained from a free declaration of their opinions, he had an opportunity of knowing the sentiments of many of them ever since he had the honour of bringing forward a motion relative to the royal boroughs; and he could positively assert, that there never was a time when the people there were more dissatisfied than at present. It was, indeed, a sullen and silent dissatisfaction, from which the right hon. gentleman opposite might argue approbation. But, he remarked, they are the more to be dreaded, because oppression kept it silent; but they are as far from being satisfied as the man who should be stunned by a violent blow, and should then be said to express no dissatisfaction.

Mr. Sheridan presented a petition from the inhabitants of Douse, in Scotland, against the bills.

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NOVEMBER 26.

LIBEL ON THE CONSTITUTION.

*Mr. Sheridan moved the order of the day; which being read, for the resumed debate on the libel on the constitution,*

MR. SHERIDAN said, that though this was only a resumed debate, as he had troubled the house very shortly on the former occasion, he should again solicit their indulgence a little more at length; and this he should do perfectly consistent with order, as he meant to move an amendment to his former motion. Though the most part of the time, since the libel had been read, had been occupied with the business of the house, he had again read it carefully over. If the part which had chiefly been referred to had been found to be only a solitary passage, if there had appeared better doctrines in other parts of the work, and if the whole had not formed a most audacious libel on the constitution, he would have been less disposed to have pushed the present proceeding. The whole seemed to be the result of settled malignity, and a deliberate attack on the most sacred rights of the constitution, systematically conducted, and supported by powerful means of giving effect to the hostile intentions of the parties concerned in that attack. He was surprised to hear a right hon. gentleman

(Mr. Wyndham), on the night that the pamphlet was read, declare, that the exceptionable passage was perfectly innocent—a declaration which implicated that right hon. gentleman in the doctrines which were there avowed. Mr. Wyndham just entered at that moment, when Mr. Sheridan said, that he hoped he had re-considered the subject, and was no longer disposed to support such abominable doctrines as were maintained in that pamphlet. He must again repeat, that what chiefly induced him to call the attention of the house to this attack on the constitution was, that it seemed to be connected with means of the most extensive circulation. He was most strongly disposed to press the subject, because the publication was ascribed to Mr. Reeves, the chairman of the Loyal Association at the Crown and Anchor, the fruitful source of those numerous associations which sprung up in the country during the influence of alarm; and a man whom the right hon. secretary at war had described as entitled to the national gratitude, on account of his exertions in the service of the public. He understood, by the imputation, that he was the author, and was this night to be disavowed in a very solemn manner. He should be happy that this was the case, as he had formerly the pleasure of knowing the gentleman when he was a member of the Whig Club. But it would be completely satisfactory to assert, that he had no share in penning the work; in order to exculpate him from the charge of having approved the doctrines which it contained, it would be necessary to prove that he had no connection in putting it into circulation, from the funds of an association paid by government, or at least supported by the subscriptions of persons in office. The whole work breathed the same spirit of hostility to the constitution. Among other extraordinary positions it contained the following: “That all liberty is derived from the throne; that all security for the rights of the subjects flows from the same quarter; that the revolution in 1688 was a mockery and a farce; that the dissenters are a pestilential and a factious race, who never will be at peace while they are suffered to exist; that all whigs are in their hearts republicans, watching every opportunity to overturn the constitution; that a constitutional lawyer is either a knave or a fool; that the decision of juries ought to have no weight; and, last of all, that the lords and commons may be lopped off from the constitution, and the monarchy go on in all its functions.”



Mr. Sheridan then proceeded to read some extracts. He adverted to the history which the author had given of the reformation, which he ascribed, from the beginning, to French principles, as the first reformers were Frenchmen: so that we had now discovered a new evil, though rather of old date, which might be traced to the effect of French principles; namely, all the calamities which had followed from the Reformation. The author, who did not seem very partial to the sects who arose in consequence of the Reformation, gave no quarter to the dissenters: he treated them all as a set of Maroons and Caribs, fit only to be exterminated. Speaking of the revolution in 1688, his expressions were, "It has been vulgarly called the revolution; upon what authority I know not; it was not so named by parliament, nor is it a term known to our laws." He was surprised how this bold and ignorant author should dare to treat with contempt that glorious event which secured the liberties of Englishmen, and which was recognized in the statutes by that name. He would find the name employed in the proceedings on the trial of Dr. Sacheverel, to which he might, in all probability, have shortly occasion to refer. He had farther insinuated, "that so much commemoration of the revolution cannot sound agreeably in the ears of the present sovereign." What an outrage to his Majesty! that an event could not sound agreeably in his ears which seated his family on the throne! "But what manner of men," says the author, "must they be, who make this a subject for tavern meetings, for congratulation, and for frivolous festivity! A subject to declaim, to combine, to run stark mad upon! However, they know their meaning, and there are very few of us who do not know their meaning also. All this wondrous passion is excited by the idea of a revolution; what they idolize is a revolution in the abstract, and these revolutionary principles are the only ideas they profess of our constitution." With respect to any form of government established at the revolution, that was a thing utterly unknown. "The government, we know," says the author, "and the laws we know—but the constitution we know not. It is an unknown region, that has never been visited but by dreamers and men who see visions; and the reports they make are so contradictory, that no one relies on them." After a great deal of scurrility against the whigs, the author adverts to the gentlemen who were tried on a charge of high treason and acquitted. "The designs of these

democrats have been fully exposed to the public view on the late trials of some of them last year for high treason ; they were then acquitted by a jury, but they have since been found guilty by their country." But this sentiment he accompanied with others, of which the following passage would afford a specimen : " What disappointment and discomfiture it must be to these idolizers of the constitution, supposed to be established at the revolution, to discover at length that they have bestowed their applause and affection upon the shreds and patches of old date ; and that if they had lived in those wicked reigns of Charles II. and James, they would have enjoyed in theory, though not in practice, as good a constitution as they have had since, with the single exception of a Protestant king." Mr. Sheridan proceeded to read some other passages in the same strain, commenting upon them as he went along, and concluded, that as the pamphlet abounded only with passages of this kind, any farther examination of its contents would be unnecessary. In the outset of his speech he mentioned that his attention had chiefly been called to the subject, because the pamphlet now before the house appeared to him not merely to be the effort of individual malice, but to be part of a deliberate and settled system of attack carried on against the constitution, conducted by regular approaches, supported by powerful means, and branching into extensive ramifications. This conspiracy had been going on for some years, during which no expense or activity had been spared in the circulation of pamphlets. It was not in this pamphlet alone that such doctrines were preached. They had been circulated two years ago, by Mr. Reeves, in another pamphlet, entitled, " The Example of France, a Warning to Britain," written by Arthur Young, Esq. ; to which we find affixed a letter, dated from the Crown and Anchor committee room, March 18, 1793, signed John Reeves, chairman, communicating a resolution of thanks for the excellent performance, to which they wished to call the public attention, as it is a work that cannot fail of making a great impression on all who read it. In this pamphlet by Mr. Young, continued Mr. Sheridan, we find the same doctrines, and nearly the same expressions, with those of which we complain in the pamphlet supposed to be written by Mr. Reeves. It maintains, " That those who assert that the king and nobility of England were made for the people, do not seem to have any just recollection of that which made the people of



England; such has been the fostering and paternal tenderness of this government, that the constitution of England, formed by the crown and nobility, may with great truth be said to have produced the people."

Here we find, said Mr. Sheridan, the people of England to have been produced in consequence of a marriage between the crown and nobility. "Beyond all doubt, the crown and the nobility made the constitution, and the people, properly so called, never thoroughly interfered on their own account, but to destroy it. The crown and the barons laid the foundation of that which, at the revolution, was by the nobility matured into the present constitution. What then can be so preposterous as to assert that the crown and the nobility were made for those who were created by their influence—who were fashioned by their hands?" In another part Mr. Young asserts, that, "The house of commons was not created by the people, but the crown; it never did represent the people in any period of our history, and is not responsible to the people." These passages, said Mr. Sheridan, are the original, from which those sentiments, of which we now complain, seem to be taken; for they maintain that the constitution is a thing made by the crown, and insinuate that the crown has a right to destroy it. Mr. Reeves, assuming him to be the author, tells us in his pamphlet, "That the lords and commons derive their origin and nutriment from the crown." By the words "origin and nutriment," we must suppose he means that the king makes all the peers, and pensions the greater part of the commons. But Mr. Young, who is so partial to the crown, does not neglect, also, to give a boon to another of the legislature. He exempts the members of the house of commons from all responsibility with respect to the people, and thus frees their shoulders from a most uneasy burden. But other passages in Mr. Young's book are still more curious, and still greater libels on the British constitution. He says "to call the house of commons the representatives of the people is a very inaccurate mode of expression; they ought never to be called by any other name than the house of commons, to distinguish them from the house of lords. If they really were the representatives of the people, they might in theory be good, or better; but they would be something else than what they are. But reformers say, they are corrupted and bribed. If they are bribed, in order to act wisely, it is an argu-

ment against you. If the nature of such an assembly demands to be corrupted, in order to procure the public good, who, but a visionary, can wish to remove corruption? Government, certainly, would have been carried on cheaper, if honesty alone had induced the house of commons to act as corruption has induced them." "An equal representation, rotten boroughs, long parliaments, extravagant courts, selfish ministers, and corrupt majorities, are so intimately interwoven with our practical freedom, that it would require better political anatomists than our modern reformers, to show on fact, that we did not owe our liberty to the identical evils which they want to expunge."—What a shocking revival, said Mr. Sheridan, and how abominable the conclusion he has drawn! If such, indeed, be a just account of the state of things, I would rather agree with Mr. Reeves, that the corrupt branches ought to be lopped off, than subscribe to that infamous proposition, that to this very source of corruption we are to trace all our blessings. Speaking of a parliamentary reform, he says, "I know well the result; corruption would be banished the constitution." In comparing the constitution to a machine that has gone well for an hundred years, perhaps, it is indifferent whether influence (which these reformers call corruption) be termed the dust or the oil of the machine; for if it has gone well for a century, and seems, while certain wheels are half covered with dust, to go better than formerly, I would no more allow the dust to be brushed away, than I would allow the oil to be removed. Influence, however, is not the dust, but the oil of the machine; the constitution never went for a moment without influence" (meaning, said Mr. Sheridan, corruption); "and to remove it would be taking away the oil which has given a century of smoothness." But now Mr. Young, who, a few years ago, was a violent reformer, and even an advocate for what is called French principles, has obtained a salary or pension of £400 per annum under government, and having greased his pen with the oil of corruption, which he calls influence, he has discovered that it is essentially necessary to the welfare of the constitution. When I mentioned that these infamous productions had means of extensive circulation, it may not be improper for me to explain, that the political essays of Mr. Young are printed at the same office, and conveyed into the country through the same channel as the reports and papers of the board of agricul-



ture. Mr. Sheridan concluded, never was there any country in which there was so much absence of public principle, and at the same time so many instances of private worth. Never was there so much charity and humanity towards the poor and the distressed; any act of cruelty or oppression never failed to excite a sentiment of general indignation against its authors. It was a circumstance peculiarly strange, that though luxury had arrived to such a pitch, it had so little effect in depraving the hearts and destroying the morals of people in private life, and almost every day produced some fresh example of generous feelings and noble exertions of benevolence. Yet, amidst these phenomena of private virtue, it was to be remarked, that there was an almost total want of public spirit, and a most deplorable contempt of public principle. To what could this be ascribed, but to the circulation of those libellous pamphlets, the prevalence of those abominable doctrines, which represented public corruption and profligacy as necessary parts of our constitution, as the security for its continuance, and the source of its blessings?—Such doctrines, however, could not fail to have the most fatal effects, and from the alarming symptoms of the times, there was but too much reason to fear that these would be speedily experienced in their utmost extent.—When Great Britain fell, the case would not be with her, as with Rome in former times. When Rome fell, she fell by the weight of her own vices. The inhabitants were so corrupted and degraded, as to be unworthy of a continuance of prosperity, and incapable to enjoy the blessings of liberty; their minds were bent to the state in which a reverse of fortune placed them. But when Great Britain falls, she will fall with a people full of private worth and virtue: she will be ruined by the profligacy of the governors, and the security of her inhabitants—the consequence of those pernicious doctrines which have taught her to place a false confidence in her strength and freedom, and not to look with distrust and apprehension to the misconduct and corruption of those to whom she has trusted the management of her resources. She will exhibit for a time the fallacious appearance of health and vigour, but the cause of her decay is within herself. The worm, corruption, will eat into her heart and consume her existence. If gentlemen, then, wish to avert the period of her destruction, let them oppose the progress of those pernicious doctrines which are the source of the evil.

Mr. Sheridan said, he was not sure what mode of proceeding he should propose to the house to adopt. He should now, however, move an amendment to his motion, the words of which were taken from the proceedings on Sacheverel's trial, and sure he was, that none of the libels on that occasion were equal in point of settled malignity and dangerous tendency, to that which was now submitted for the consideration of the house.

The following is the original motion, "That the said pamphlet is a malicious, scandalous, and seditious libel, containing matter tending to create jealousies and divisions among his Majesty's loyal subjects; to alienate their affections from our present happy form of government, as established in king, lords, and commons; and to subvert the true principles of our free constitution; and that the said pamphlet is a high breach of the privileges of this house."

The words which he moved, as an amendment to his motion, were these, that after the word "libel," there be inserted—"Reflecting on the late glorious revolution."

*Sir John Sinclair vindicated the board of agriculture; he declared that no political discussions ever took place there; nor was their secretary (Mr. A. Young) ever employed by the board in the circulation of political pamphlets.*

Mr. Sheridan acknowledged the utility of that institution, but repeated, that Mr. A. Young had a salary or pension from the crown as its secretary, and that persons who were employed by him in circulating agricultural reports, also conveyed through the country his political productions; the hon. gentleman who spoke last would, probably, not think that these pamphlets tended much to improve the state of the country.

*The original motion was put and carried, with only two dissenting voices; Mr. Sheridan having, with the leave of the house, withdrawn his amendment, as to its being a libel on the revolution.*

Mr. Sheridan congratulated the house on the unanimity with which the resolution had been adopted, for, except the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Wyndham) and his convert (Sir W. Dolben), there was not one voice against it. He would give the right hon. gentleman all the benefit of his alliance, and call the attention of the house to the next step. The house now having adopted his motion, it was proper that some proceedings should be grounded upon it, and that it should not be suffered to stand by itself on their journals. He had been made more anxious in



pushing this proceeding, because, as he had before stated, he did not consider the publication to be a solitary libel, but to have issued from a quarter possessing extensive means of circulating attacks against the constitution. He stated the various modes of proceeding that might be adopted, and referred to precedents in former times. At a period when party ran very high, a pamphlet of Dr. Swift's (on the conduct of the allies), a very innocent and useful work, was ordered by the house to be burnt by the hands of the hangman. Mr. Sheridan said, that under the circumstances of the present case, what he considered to be of most importance was to come at the person of the author. He had reason to believe that Mr. Reeves was the author, and since he came into the house he had been confirmed in his belief. He had been given to understand that a formal disavowal would be made of the fact, but he considered that which had been made by the secretary at war to be by no means sufficiently precise or satisfactory. He had great objections to instituting any oppressive prosecutions against a poor printer or publisher, who looked for security to the character of his employer, and could have no idea that he would receive any thing of a libellous or unconstitutional tendency from the chairman of a loyal association. In order that proper steps might be taken to come at the person of the author, a power which Mr. Sheridan conceived that the house ought not to delegate out of their own hands, he would adopt a precedent of 1707, and concluded with moving, "That it be referred to a committee to inquire who was the author of the libel."

*This motion was also carried.*

END OF VOL. II.

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JOHN LEIGHTON, PRINTER,  
JOHNSON'S-COURT, FLEET-STREET.







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